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LATE SUMMER

LATE SUMMER

BY

BARBARA WILSON

. . . Ah, forgotten things
Stumble back strangely! and the ghost of June
Stands by December's fire.

LYTTON.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1938

I

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I

TO
MAURICE BARING

Glad, but not flushed with gladness—
 Since joys go by ;
Sad, but not bent with sadness—
 Since sorrows die :
Deep in the gleaming glass
She sees all past things pass,
 And all sweet life that was . . .

There glowing ghosts of flowers
 Draw down, draw nigh ;
And wings of swift spent hours
 Take flight and fly. . . .

SWINBURNE.

I

MISS USHERWOOD said she would read out the list of the contents of the consignment she was sending to Headquarters on Thursday. When Mary Usherwood came into the Jubilee Hall everyone had a comfortable feeling that the captain was on board. Before her arrival the sewing party had drifted, rudderless, but just the sight of her at the moment of entrance, crisp and fresh as a well-grown lettuce, in her green linen dress and burnt-straw hat, heartened the crew of seamstresses.

To-day she informed them that she could give them an hour of her company, no more. She had to catch the 4.10 train to London, as she had an appointment with the dentist at 5.30. It was the only time he could see her this week. She had tried hard to fix another. A light murmur of disappointment went round the room, tinged with sympathy.

She took her usual seat at the end of the table, her back to the window—vis-à-vis to the treadle sewing-machine. Two meaner machines stood lower down the table, but they were little used ; with the hum of three in action, talk would have

been impossible; Mary Usherwood's, as a solo instrument, stimulated it. She plunged her hand into the placket-hole of her well-hung skirt and extracted the Red Cross correspondence. Flashing a smile to the attentive ladies she carried out her promise without more ado.

"I'll read it very quickly, so that we lose no time, and Mrs. Ames, I'm sure, will be kind enough to check the items." She peeped over the edge of her gold-rimmed spectacles to see if her lieutenant was at hand with stacks of garments. She was.

"Two dozen pairs socks, eighteen pairs of operation stockings, sixteen shirts, one dozen Balaclava helmets, nine pairs of mittens with thumbs, fourteen muffatees (I wish things were all in dozens, it seems so much more business-like), fifteen bed-jackets, a dozen huckaback towels, and thirty crocheted *swabs* ;" this in a jubilant crescendo. "I believe they are very welcome for washing the wards. And then we have a parcel of what I can only call sundries. Got the bundle, Mrs. Ames?—it's by the window. It's mostly handkerchiefs and scarves made by the schoolchildren." She looked up triumphantly. "Well, I think that's a great harvest for six weeks' labour."

Nearly everybody said "Splendid," whilst Mary consulted her silver wrist-watch. "I see that

I've got exactly fifty minutes before I need leave for the station—I've got my bike outside—so I'll just straighten out the difficulties of anyone who needs help, and do the cutting-out required."

Several ladies left their seats at once to cluster round her. She leant graciously towards one or the other, examining the work. Rolls of flannelette and shirting, and a communal work-basket overflowing like a cornucopia with reels of cotton, tape, and packets of needles, divided her from the other seated figures. She was ennobled by these signs of office, raised to a status which no one resented.

Now she was explaining the golden way of dealing with the seams of bedjackets. "They must be stitched by hand always—herring-boned—that makes them so much more comfy for the dear Tommies—no thick ridges to lie on. By the way, the Red Cross has asked for more jackets. They've such a lot of typhoid convalescents. I've got the paper pattern in the cupboard. . . . Would you . . . ? Thank you, Mrs. Ames, I'd better get some ready for you to take home with you, as three is such urgent need—shall I ?" She swept the company with a point of interrogation quivering on her eyebrows.

The Vicar's wife sat on her right. She would

have liked to preside, as befitted her rank, but that could not be. Miss Usherwood always presided. She did not usurp the position, but she found herself, no one knew how, the unelected president at every meeting. "The Mothers' Union are sending us their contributions the day after to-morrow, aren't they, Mrs. Piercey?" (She was unrivalled in soothing any vexed spirit, by appealing for confirmation.) "They are a little behind schedule, but one can't blame them, they have such busy days. *You* know better than most people what their lives are!"—(Mrs. Piercey seldom entered a cottage)—"a hungry husband, a house full of squalling brats—and the wash-tub. Shall I thread that needle for you, Mrs. Webster? The light's not very good where you are sitting; would you like to move up to this end? Isn't it nice not to be sewing by artificial light! I quite dread the winter evenings coming round again; didn't the lamps smell last year? Now I'll just machine the side seams of these shirts before I run away." She placed her sensible low-heeled shoe on the treadle and the hall was filled with the soft whirring, as cosy as the voice of a kettle on the hob. A kettle *was* on the hob—downstairs. At four o'clock it would be requisitioned to brew fifteen cups of good black tea.

They began to talk of local events: of the

flower-show (future) and the choir-treat (past) ; and then of the happenings beyond the boundaries of this peaceful Berkshire village. Contentment brooded over the group. It was pleasant to feel that they were doing so much to help "the absent-minded beggar." Somebody always managed to drag these words in during the session. This afternoon Miss Minnie Porter revolted.

"Just think of those lines :

*'Cook's son—Duke's son—son of a belted Earl—
Son of a Lambeth publican—it's all the same
to-day !
Each of 'em doing his country's work
(and who's to look after the girl?).'*

Really, Mr. Kipling ! "

"I think they meet the case very well," Mrs. Piercey objected, "though I must say I don't like 'earl' to rhyme with 'girl.' "

"And I don't like anything which encourages class consciousness," Miss Porter answered tartly. "People are quite aware of the common sacrifice, and in our history it's always been the upper classes which have set the example—*noblesse oblige*—it's quite unnecessary to stress the point."

"I don't agree, I think it should be insisted on. The Vicar tells me there is a great deal of Socialism

about. The Independent Labour Party is very active."

"Yes, we are rather a small party to-day," old Mrs. Webster murmured. She was too deaf to catch more than one word in any sentence. "Let me see, who's absent?" Mrs. Piercey assisted her in counting noses. All those here were sunburnt, freckled, and innocent of powder.

"Lady Gardner hasn't come, and Marion Verlander has failed us—that's unusual."

"She's so tied to her father, poor thing."

"I expect he's away for Epsom. It's the Derby on Wednesday, of course."

"So it is." Miss Usherwood was speaking. "But doesn't it seem strange to think that all these functions continue in spite of the war?"

"It's wrong," said Mrs. Piercey, "quite wrong. We ought to bring home to the nation the seriousness of the struggle. Of course South Africa, for the majority, seems a long way off, and after eight months people have grown case-hardened, and need a constant reminder. And we don't want them to know *everything* that's going on out there—certainly not all that is going on at the Mount Nelson Hotel at Cape Town. My nephew writes to me that it's shocking . . . too shocking."

A new focus of interest had been discovered.

“What did your nephew say, exactly?”

“I think somebody compared it to Sodom and Gomorrah—or was it Tyre and Sidon. Anyway it’s dreadful. And then all these camp-following women—*ladies*—in the hospitals. I’m not talking of the V.A.D.’s—they have been superb—but those who have gone out from England to feed the typhoids on buns. I can’t think how the authorities sanction it. I’m afraid it’s all very lax. Look at the War Correspondents! They seem to be in the fighting line. Poor Mr. Winston Churchill was taken prisoner. . . .”

“Hasn’t he got an American mother? I remember seeing her opening a bazaar. A most beautiful, talented woman.”

“One can scarcely judge of a woman’s ability from a bazaar-opening. I once heard our own dear Duchess say, ‘I bazaar this declare open,’ but it seemed to do just as well . . . charming as she is, I would never describe her as a good speaker. But then, do we want women speakers? It’s so extraordinary that Sir John French’s sister is, I believe, an ardent advocate of Woman’s Suffrage. Of course they’ll *never* get the vote. It would be the end of England if they did.”

“What do you think is going to win the Derby?” Mrs. Ames asked irrelevantly. “For a Derby we’re going to have, war or no war.”

"Of course there are two ways of looking at it," Miss Usherwood remarked, mollified. "Cancelling all national festivities would mean a great loss to trade."

"You can't describe the Derby as an occasion for national rejoicing. Hundreds and thousands of people are ruined through it yearly. The Vicar and I belong to the Anti-Betting League."

"But it would be nice to know if the favourite is going to win," Mrs. Ames sighed.

"Well, one can't imagine a summer without the Derby or Ascot."

"Or even a Fourth of June," someone added ; "that would be hard on the youngsters."

"There's much too much made of them nowadays." Mrs. Webster was again struggling with her needle, biting off her cotton and applying herself to the thread with the patient resolution of Robert Bruce's spider. "I'm like the old woman who said she had never eaten a hot-house peach, because in her youth they were reserved for her elders, and in her declining years they were kept for the children."

Miss Porter's eye was roving round the room. She was appraising the summer hats and dresses in it. Most of them, she noted, were made of light "voile," with bell-shaped skirts and elbow sleeves

as she had seen them sketched in *The Queen*. The high collar-bands strained round the necks were held up, below the ears, by little pieces of whale-bone. One could probably buy these at that small shop called Harrod's Stores. Only Mrs. Webster was faithful to the toque. The younger ladies were wearing wide-brimmed hats trimmed with flowers or fruit, some had ostrich feathers added to their luxuriant vegetation. It was very useful for Miss Porter to have this glimpse of the London fashions before she saw Miss Mifflin this evening. Miss Mifflin was a treasure ; few villages could boast of such a reliable little dressmaker.

"Now, ladies, I must leave you." Mary Usherwood had risen. "Wild horses would not drag me away—only the dentist's forceps can do that." She laughed good-naturedly, and brushed the tacking threads from the front panel of her skirt.

Mrs. Ames expressed consternation. "Not an extraction? How dreadful!"

"Oh dear, no, I was only joking—it's just a repair to my denture. I shall hope to see you all on Monday, and I'll tell Mrs. Chalmers to bring up tea as I go down. It's close on four. Good-bye, everybody."

There was a shuffling of seats after she left the room. It was not nice to lose Miss Usherwood, but

it was very pleasant after she had left. Friends got together on the trivial excuse of borrowing a pair of scissors, or an emery cushion. They formed intimate groups, a general relaxation was evident, and Mary became at once the subject of mild criticism.

“It’s all very well for her to say that there’s to be no entertaining while the war continues. The neighbourhood was dull enough before, now it’s completely dead. So many houses have been shut up, and the few that remain open might just as well be closed. Look at Foxley! I haven’t been inside Foxley for twelve months.”

“That’s not the war, that’s just Marion Verlander.” Miss Porter took up the challenge. “She’s never entertained. It was so different in her mother’s time. . . . No, of course you don’t remember that, Mrs. Piercey. It was before you came to the Vicarage. Lady Verlander was so gregarious—a typical Irishwoman, warm-hearted and hospitable—and such a pretty creature too.”

“I wouldn’t call Marion good-looking; would you?”

“No, not strictly speaking, but she has good points—a nice figure, and such beautiful hair. When she came out I thought she’d marry immediately.”

"That's some time ago," Miss Porter commented grimly.

"Yes, indeed, it must be twenty years ago—or more."

"No, not more. I remember the date exactly of the ball given for her coming of age. It was the year my sonnie was born and I couldn't go to it. Her poor mother died a few months later."

"It seems odd to talk of a girl coming of age."

"Not if the estate goes to her. I believe Marion succeeds to everything. She is sole heiress."

"It doesn't seem to have facilitated marriage in her case."

"I expect she's afraid of fortune-hunters—girls with money are. I'm sure she's had a great many suitors."

"I'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Piercey objected. "There's the difficulty of the religion. Not every man wants a Roman Catholic wife."

"No, but every man would like a rich one."

Mrs. Phipps moved her chair nearer to the speakers. "What were you and Miss Porter discussing? Marion Verlander? She's a dear—a real good sort. You can always trust her; she's one in a million."

"You can trust her with a million men,

obviously." (Miss Porter was really too acidulated to-day.)

"Perhaps she doesn't intend to marry—ever."

"She'll have to look sharp about it if she does. What age do you make her, Mrs. Ames?"

"Thirty-nine on the 7th of November."

"She doesn't look it," Sybil Phipps declared.

"It must be matrimony which ages us all."

Minnie Porter smiled.

"Well, if it's not her age nor her prospects, nor her religion which has interfered with her marriage, what is it?" (Mrs. Ames was addressing herself to Mrs. Phipps, and deliberately ignored Miss Porter.)

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps she's over-educated. Men don't like that; it intimidates them."

"Not she." The Vicar's wife was emphatic. "She never went to college, not even to a good school like Cheltenham. She was brought up here, by that French governess, and then I think she 'finished' in Paris—or was it Dresden? I always say that the higher education of women leads to marriage, and the Vicar agrees with me. Trixie and Mabel got their degrees, and they were both wives—and mothers—before they were twenty-six."

"I think it's her devotion to her father, if you

ask me." Nobody had thought of asking Mrs. Darley anything. She was a Virginian by birth, and had only come to the neighbourhood recently. It was difficult to remember her even when she was present, and she was seldom allowed to let her soft, drawling Southern voice be heard.

"It must be a grief to Sir Thomas that he has no son," Miss Porter chipped in.

"I don't think so," Mrs. Darley asserted; "she's son and daughter to him. They are lovely people, both of them. I never saw anything more touching than their relationship. I don't believe he ever repines."

Mrs. Ames wished she had said something more disagreeable about Americans when Lady Randolph Churchill's name had come up. It was too late now.

"We attribute a great importance to *sons* in England—to carry on the name, you know."

"Why, yes, of course; but one doesn't need to bother about the name with such a background as hers."

"All I can say is that the Verlanders are peculiar." Mrs. Craddock had begun folding her work. "It's the house, I think; such a huge spookish place. I'm glad I don't have to live there. A few pins, please, Mrs. Ames."

"I wish we could have the opportunity of seeing it more often. My poor little Sadie was asking me only the other day if she could ever get into the picture gallery. She studied art at Columbia before we came to live in England, after Mr. Darley passed on. Of course I can't do a thing about it; I know Miss Verlander so slightly." Mrs. Darley was very unassuming—for an American.

Tea came in on a black japanned tray. Though the cups were not over-filled, each saucer contained a ring of brown fluid which discoloured the lumps of sugar laid in it.

"Isn't it a little strong again? Might we have the hot water-jug at once, Mrs. Chalmers?"

"Wouldn't anybody like a biscuit, there's a tin of Maries in the work-cupboard?" But nobody wanted anything to eat—tea and talk were quite enough.

"This scarlet flannel makes me think of the refrain of another Kipling poem :

'Thin red line of 'eroes when the drums begin to roll.'"

"Silly," Minnie Porter sniffed. "Who bothers about the Crimea, and it's a khaki line now."

"Did you ever hear of khaki before this war? It seems such a pity that all regiments have to wear the same hideous manure-coloured uniforms. Yes,

even the Highlanders have khaki aprons to cover their kilts. I'm sure it affects the recruiting ; they don't look like the soldiers of the Queen now."

" I hear she's failing very much."

" Who ? "

" The Queen. It's dreadful that the last years of her reign should be shadowed by this war. It's not like an Indian frontier skirmish, or a punitive expedition against a Mullah or a Mahdi. Look what it's costing in blood and treasure ! But it can't last much longer, can it ? "

After the tea interlude they settled down to work again till six o'clock. Then one or two remained behind to tidy up the table, the others wandered into the village street, filled with home-going workmen and playing schoolchildren. The church bell was tolling lethargically, as if it were too weary after so many centuries to trouble about reminding folks of Evensong. Skipping-ropes were twirling across the centre of the street, and dust flew around whipping-tops. The criss-cross drawn for hop-scotch was traced in the sandy surface of the road, it looked as if a crop of dandelions had been sewn, so many golden heads were catching the low rays of the sun.

Mrs. Ames and Miss Porter wheeled their bicycles to the Post Office.

“Glorious weather,” said the postmistress. The tap-tapping of Morse code came from the living-room behind the shop, where her husband was operating. She signed to the little boy, who was handing her a moist penny across the counter as tender for pear-drops, to stand back.

“Is it a five-shilling order you require, Ma’am? And half-a-crown of penny stamps for you, Miss? Just a minute, love, you shall have your sweeties.” She tore the stamps from the large lilac-coloured sheet. The change she gave the ladies was taken from the box which had contained the Christmas gift of chocolate from Her Majesty to the troops. It bore her image brilliantly enamelled on the brass lid. “My son sent that home last mail. I’m very proud to possess it. It seems almost as good as a medal, but he’ll get that too, won’t he? Yes, thank you, he’s keeping very well. I’ve a great deal to be thankful for that he wasn’t shut up in Ladysmith or Mafeking. He’s met a lot of friends out there—lads from the village and the farms around. Jim Goddard, him as was working at the gardens of Foxley Place, and young Roger Bailey from the Verlander Arms. He’s with the Yeomanry, in course. He took part in the Relief of Kimberley. His father told me he’d never had his boots off for ten days during the march—think of it. Ah, well, I reckon

they'll be glad to get home! Any post cards, Miss Porter? Well, good evening, Mrs. Ames; good evening, Miss Minnie."

They collected their bicycles, which had been leaning dejectedly against the cream-washed façade of the little house, and straddled the frames circumspectly, dividing their skirts in equal portions; the mudguards laced with green cord prevented their petticoats from coming into contact with the wheel.

"Shall I see you at the Vicarage on Thursday? I've been asked for tennis?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I've promised to take the kiddies on the river if it's a fine day."

"It's sure to be fine, we're having such a wonderful summer."

They glanced as they passed by at the recruiting posters stuck on the walls of the Blue Anchor. A sergeant with a swagger-stick under his arm came out of it. He saluted them smartly.

II

It was two days later that these ladies and a great many others besides, who lived further afield, received Marion Verlander's invitation. Rather a strange coincidence that the invitation should follow so quickly on the heels of the discussion at the sewing meeting ; almost as if Miss Verlander had overheard them, or guessed that people were growing restive, tired of good works, weary of well-doing, or as if telepathy had passed on the criticisms of Mrs. Ames and the complaints of Miss Porter.

They were stating the truth when they had said that all social life in the neighbourhood was at a standstill. It was like living in a house where dust-covers shroud the furniture and the carpets are all rolled up. Everything for months past had been dimmed and muted by the knowledge of the heroism and suffering which letters from the Front revealed. Yet with the loveliness of the first spring of the new century the memory of "drear-nighted December," and the horrors of Magersfontein, Colenso and Elands-laagte faded. England had turned the corner ; the return of her heroes could

not be long delayed. The resistance of the Boers was crumbling; the newspapers said their morale had broken.

Yes, Marion Verlander was sensible that everyone needed relaxation and change, for everyone had worked hard and long. She flattered herself she had hit on a happy idea—an entertainment that would not savour of the piping times of peace, and yet would prove a distraction suitable for old and young. She wrote a letter to each lady and enclosed a printed card, giving the dates and subjects of Madame Grandchose's lectures. Eighty-nine invitations were sent off on the same day. Sellars, counting them in the pantry, felt that he would never have enough saliva to stick on so many stamps, and called in the pantry-boy from the lamp-room to assist him, for it was James' afternoon off, and Frederick, the first footman, was busy cleaning the silver. The abominable urchin, who smelt of paraffin, seemed to possess an inexhaustible supply of spit—it was the only occasion on which he had been tried and not found wanting—but he had to hurry, for the postman collected the bag (a dear old leather pouch dating back to the days of Sir Thomas' grandfather, with his name engraved on the flap) punctually as the clock struck four-thirty. When Sellars had handed it over, he went to join

Mrs. Tansy in the steward's room, and the cosy was immediately removed from the tea-pot. It was the ritual of every day, but this abnormal and intriguing increase in Miss Marion's correspondence had delayed him a little longer than usual. She had written some post cards this afternoon—those too took time to read.

The following morning the Berkshire neighbours were opening her letters at their breakfast tables, and some of them were saying, "How nice to have arranged this!" but a few added, "Has one to *buy* the tickets? What's this in aid of? There's no end to it this year."

"A personal letter makes it so much more difficult to refuse," said Lady Gardner, and tossed hers to Sir Humphrey across the silver urn. He read it, frowning.

"I wish Marion would not be so whimsical. Just listen to this: 'I hope you will both be able to come and make better acquaintance with two great ladies from France, Madame Mohl and Madame Récamier. I know you and Sir Humphrey will enjoy these—what's that word? oh, *causeries*' (How does she know we shall?) 'We are going to have tea and strawberries afterwards on the terrace.' No, my dear, you and Enid can go, but she won't catch me."

It was doubtful whether Marion wanted to, despite her cajoling letter, his wife reflected, but all she said was, "It certainly sounds more suitable for her dilettanti friends."

"Talkittanti you mean," he grumbled, handing the offending note to his wife, and leaving the dining-room with *The Times*, turned inside-out and rolled into a rhomboid, under his arm.

Though the Duchess took it differently, her reaction was also one of annoyance. "How extraordinary! . . . Marion Verlander must know that Wednesday is my hospital afternoon. She should have consulted me before embarking on this. I'll get Miss Robinson to write and explain, and then she'll probably alter the dates."

At the Vicarage there was no hostile comment. Mrs. Piercey, bewildered, exclaimed: "It will be very pleasant to meet some French people. Marion does not say if they are staying with her, or just coming down from London for the day. You will be able to go, dear?" The Vicar asked pertinently if the lectures were to be in English.

The playful formula, which had exasperated Sir Humphrey, had unfortunately been used by Marion in several of her invitations, but in the one she sent to Wingates she had been more explicit. "Madame

Grandchose's French is supreme," she had written to Mrs. Dempster.

"How absolutely ridiculous to write that! She might as well say that my English is perfect."

"That, I agree, would be equally fantastic," replied Charles Dempster, Fellow of All Souls.

"How does she expect us to get to Foxley?" lamented the elder Miss Bates. She was picking the first green peas in her garden, and she looked at the card in her sister's hand across the row. "It must be nearly nine miles—an hour and a half's drive along the main road, before one turns off at Little Lockenham. It's all very well for the fortunate few who have motors."

"It's the people who have motors who make the roads impossible for those who haven't. I shall take to wearing goggles and veils, like they do, against the dust."

The mileage offered no obstacle to Mrs. Ames. She lived within easy walking distance, and she consented to call for Miss Porter at The Lilacs on her way; but in the end they agreed to meet outside the South Lodge at two-thirty—that would allow them plenty of time to cross the park. "I always like approaching Foxley by the lower road. The first time I ever went there, with my dear husband, he drove me up by that entrance; I was

very much impressed. It is impressive, you know. The old gates with the stone demi-wolves and the family motto carved on their shields—*Joye sans fin.*”

“Rather an optimistic one—I prefer ‘Excelsior,’ though I suppose the Verlanders feel they have no need to climb.”

Mrs. Ames continued her nebulous reminiscences. “I remember thinking the house looked like a huge dragon lying in the sun with its nose between its paws.”

“A pretty concept, but which are its paws?”

“The two wings on either side, of course. I fancied it was the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty . . . and that she lay inside.”

“But a sleeping beauty could not lie inside a dragon, unless he had devoured her, and then they would both be sleeping. He, from indigestion.”

“I don’t suppose I argued it very closely—it was just an impression I received when I was very young.” She sighed.

“Well, never mind. You’ll have another opportunity of looking at it on Wednesday, and perhaps it will inspire you with some more imaginative flights. Don’t keep me waiting.”

Marion had not thought she would receive so many acceptances. The neighbours were evidently

like those poker-players who, however unpromising their cards, decide to "come in." She liked them for being so enterprising. But how would the saloon accommodate them all ? She would have to fill the room with borrowed chairs from the Jubilee Hall.

Her father said she had overdone it. Why, he asked, invite *everybody*, every living soul in Berkshire ? Why ask the Grenvilles and the Jodrell-Dormers, and the Hentys ? None of them were subscribers to the hounds—and that vulgar Mrs. Tryon ? He was glancing through the list of guests. Marion's neat pencil-tick marked the names of those who had agreed to come "with pleasure."

"Some of the convalescing soldiers are sure to enjoy it ; there isn't much for them to do down here," she ventured.

"I should have thought that life in a South African field hospital would have been a picnic to the sort of afternoon you are offering. And how many understand more than a few words of French ?"

"Well, Captain Vaughan must," she answered lamely. "He was at the Staff College ; don't you remember him, three years ago ? He came to stay with us for Hawthorne Hill Races, and for one or two week-ends."

Her father did remember, vaguely—a gunner

wasn't he? He had been Master of the Staff College Drag, Marion prompted. That was a bull point in his favour, admittedly, but why Marion imagined that he could follow a lecture in French was past his comprehension. It was ridiculous to think that P.S.C. officers kept up their foreign languages. They mugged them up for the entrance exam.—that in itself was sufficiently absurd—and after they left Camberley they very properly and naturally forgot them, for what use would they ever be?

“And where are they going to have tea?”

“It will have to be a buffet, of course,” Marion replied brightly; “on the terrace if it's fine.”

“A buffet. . . .” Sir Thomas was stirred. “You seem to have forgotten there's a war going on. It's bad form to have a tea-fight on such a scale.” Marion reddened. She had begun to feel qualms herself.

“Sellars says it can be done very easily.” Her thoughts had strayed back to the buffet. “So don't fuss, darling. We really owe something to the neighbours. They responded splendidly when we had the bazaar here at Easter for the V.A.D.'s.”

“But lectures *in French*!” he said, returning to the charge. “Marion, we shall be figures of fun! I hope you made it clear that I have nothing to do

with them. I shall spend those days at the Rag. Which are they ? ”

He wandered out on to the lawn, his spud in hand. She stood watching him out of the long windows. His words had unnerved her. Perhaps he was right and she was offering hostages to fortune. Anyway their blood was on their own heads; they need not have accepted. Meanwhile the thought of the dislocation in the house further damped her spirits. The spectre of the lovely pine-panelled saloon desecrated by bent-wood chairs rose before her eyes—the stretch of festive buffet (in war-time !) on the terrace. No, that was altogether too risky ; tea out of doors would be asking for a thunderstorm. She visualised the wagonettes, broughams and dogcarts churning up the sodden drive. A few—God grant there would only be a few—stinking motor-cars, exuding black oil over the gravelled fore-court. . . .

Her father was pottering from daisy-patch to dandelion, his panama tilted rakishly over his perspiring brow ; its Zingari ribbon repeated the flaming colours of the border, tiger-lilies, marigolds and scarlet lychnis. What an old angel he was, but what a Cassandra ! He had lived too long at Foxley—they both had.

A surveyor, called in last year to report on the

roof, had warned them the death-watch beetle was at work in the rafters. Perhaps its insidious presence was making itself felt elsewhere. How old was her father? Seventy-two next birthday, and she would be thirty-eight in November. Her youth had gone long years ago. When? After the death of her mother. Lately, the thought of her had grown more insistent. It was the war, perhaps; there was so much talk of dying; or was it that she, Marion was already a little dead? Dead certainly in contrast to that radiant creature who had been used to run up these stairs (which Marion was climbing now on her way to her bedroom) light as a shadow, gay as the sunbeams which chase it.

She opened the door of her room—the evening light played on the *verdure* tapestry behind the four-post bed. The linenfold oak blended with the tawny and russet stems of its dream-trees. Their foliage half concealed flowers and fruits, clusters of pomegranates and citron blossoms.

Irresistibly she was drawn to the windows. Those in this Elizabethan wing were small and mullioned. She pushed the casement wider and leaned out. He was still there, heaping the extracted weeds into a pyramid under the tulip tree.

“Father, did you hear the dressing gong? It’s twenty minutes to eight.” The long evenings,

new and surprising gift of summer, were deceptive. He had lost count of time, as she had too.

She looked closely into the mirror as she unclasped her mother's pearls (they were still her mother's, though she had worn them twenty years). She did not look at her reflection often—a fleeting glance taken night and morning like a medicine was her habit. To-night, just because she should have hurried, she was in a mood to loiter.

“I'm not a bit like either of them,” she thought. “Mamma was so dark, and Father's hair must have been reddish.” Her own took no burnish from the setting sun ; ash-blond, it lay in heavy waves above her calm forehead and wide-spaced eyes. “And I've an *absurd* nose for a grown-up person, short and *retroussé* like a child's.” She gathered her hair over her shoulder and began plaiting it swiftly (it had been braided ever since her schoolroom days) and fastened it in a chignon with tortoiseshell pins.

“I shall be late, very late,—but perhaps he will too. . . .” Newman was fastening her gown.

“Sir Thomas has not gone down yet. I heard him tell Sellars to keep dinner back for ten minutes.” Respite. She would hear his footfall in the hall, but he wouldn't call for her as he had always called for her mother. She seemed to remember the very note of that cry. “Maggie, where are you ?” But then

everybody had called for her. "My Lady, can you come for a moment?" (this from the servants), and her own voice pleading, "Mamma, please come here, I do so want you." How wonderful to be claimed by all—or by one.

"The same time to-morrow morning, Miss?" Newman enquired. Yes, of course—everything was always the same.

She left her room. Though the curtains were still undrawn, the lamps were burning in the passages and on the staircase. They cast a sickly glow; always when first lit they smelt atrociously. Later on Sellars would turn them higher, and the little flame would shoot into a point, smoke for a second, and then settle into a broad bright wedge of gold.

The library was cosy and welcoming when she got there; a fire of tinder-dry logs was crackling merrily. "I shouldn't be surprised if we had a ground frost to-night—just when we have got the bedding stuff out," her father said, standing with his back to it and holding his coat-tails apart to enjoy the blaze. A ground frost in June—that was not unusual; it happened every year, and always it spread alarm; but it disappeared as you watched it in the morning, the wide scallops of whiteness under the trees melted apace, though it rested a

L A T E S U M M E R

half-hour longer on the rough grass of the park, where the deer picked their way delicately as if they would have liked to be wearing their goloshes.

But the frost never did the harm which was expected, merely bronzing the tips of a precocious dahlia or two, or blacking the eye of a laggard strawberry flower. A ground frost was the herald of a fine day, so she expressed no anxiety, smiling at him with one of her tender smiles, when he would have liked her to show concern.

III

“MRS. TRYON and Captain Vaughan.”

It was a pitilessly wet day. Sellars had shown the visitors into the boudoir. It was not his usual procedure. He was in the habit of leaving them to cool their heels in the saloon whilst he searched for Marion. She got up to greet them, totally unprepared, for Mrs. Tryon lived out of calling distance: she would hardly have recognised Luke Vaughan, he had changed utterly since his Staff College days.

“How nice of you to come—on such a day too.”

“My stepbrother has brought his car down, and it’s given me wings.” She flapped her plump arms under her beaded bolero. “We got here in no time, and we’re quite twenty miles away ! I’m afraid we were exceeding the speed limit. It’s fourteen miles an hour.”

“Wonderful.”

“Yes, wonderful—automobiles annihilate distance. Do you say ‘automobile’ or ‘motor-car’ ? ‘car’ sounds like slang, or perhaps Irish—jaunting-car, you know. I want to keep Luke with me all the summer, whilst he’s convalescing. These motor-

dowered people are tremendously popular, aren't they, Luke? I must say he thought twice before coming out to-day—for fear of skids. Skidding is said to be *frightfully* dangerous. Of course I know nothing about these things. But the temptation of coming to Foxley outweighed everything, and we felt pretty sure we should find you in during this deluge."

She had an ebullient manner, turning from one to the other of her listeners, taking them into her confidence with a disarming smile. Marion felt a sudden longing for her father's presence. He would have helped her with young Vaughan, who did not, however, appear ill at ease. His eyes were travelling appraisingly round the room.

Marion spoke to him. "We heard that you were back. It's such ages since you came here. In September '98, wasn't it? It must be heavenly to be back in England after all you've been through. Perhaps the war will be over by the time you are fit enough to return, the news is so good now. Is your Battery in Natal?"

"The news last mail was that they were going to the Orange River, but one never knows from day to day, the scene is always shifting."

"How many weeks' were you in hospital? It was a Canadian hospital—does that mean it was a

good one ? They're so short of nurses everywhere, aren't they ? That frightful typhoid after Kimberley took everybody by surprise."

"Isn't Luke *thin*; he's lost two stone," Mrs. Tryon babbled on, "but he's gained quite a lot of weight since he's been with me."

That was why Marion had scarcely recognised him ! Enteric cases looked like this, transparent and sharp-featured ; it turned young men into old ones for a time, and lent them the elegance which illness bestows.

"Will you be well enough to play any polo this summer ?"

Captain Vaughan shook his head. "I'm afraid not. My Medical Board would have something to say if I did that."

"He won't be strong enough to go back for months. When he first got home he was so weak he couldn't walk a yard ; could you, Luke ? And his heart was affected—enlarged, I think—wasn't that what the specialist reported ? Perhaps you had a large heart before ; many young men have."

Marion winced—her father was right, Mrs. Tryon was intolerable. She kept her eyes on the long graceful figure seated in the armchair which faced the window.

"How do you like Foxley in summer ?" she

asked. "It was autumn when you were here before. You've never seen the Chase with the trees in full leaf. I always think it's at its loveliest in spring, with the first green, which isn't green at all when you compare it to high summer; the little silver fringe hasn't come off the beech leaves yet."

"I like landscape in winter," he answered, a little dour, as if he condemned her conventional taste. "Trees are so fine when they are stripped and one can see their skeletons. Were those on the south side originally planted in groups, or did Nature see to it that just the right number fell to give that fine broken line?"

"I think that was the way the Chase was planted. It was never meant for an avenue. It's a shame we can't go into the garden to-day to look at the mulberries. They look like wizards—all twisted and gnarled, and full of black magic. A green bud on their venerable branches seems an impertinence. I wonder if they resent it. They're in full flower now. We ought to have a big crop of fruit. I used to think that mulled claret was made out of mulberries."

"You're a keen gardener, aren't you, Miss Verlander?" Mrs. Tryon decided that all conversation should be short-circuited by her interpolations. "Mrs. Earle told me so. I sometimes call

on her, but I don't dare invite her to come over to see me, to spy out the nakedness of my land. Everybody talks gardening nowadays. I've not a notion what it all means, so I can't be one of the herbaceous borers, anyway." (Nothing gave her pause!) "Do you actually *work* in yours? I can't bend my back, I can only point with my parasol, and suggest all sorts of unpractical things."

"The result is truly unfortunate," Luke remarked grimly.

"Well, in my young days nobody bothered about the garden except the gardener. We had beds, that's all."

Marion was watching the window—the slanting rain had ceased, a little blue patch of sky above the tree-tops suggested the sun would come out shortly.

"How is your father?" Luke Vaughan asked.

"Very well; the war has had a splendid tonic effect on him. He is one of the armchair critics all you soldiers ridicule. The mental exercise of tearing the articles of the military correspondents into shreds has kept him wonderfully fit."

"I bet he's done much more than just oakum-picking?"

"Oh yes; he's as busy as a bee, with recruiting speeches, hospital committees and all the usual irons

he has in the fire. It's County Council to-day. He'll be home at tea-time. The dog-cart has gone down to the station to fetch him—I just heard it drive through the forecourt. I hope you will stay to see him. He'll so enjoy expounding his views to you, Captain Vaughan. You might pass on his suggestions to your Staff Officers—I'm sure they'd be happy to be put on the right strategical lines."

The sun had really come out while they talked ; there was a little silvery pool of brightness on the carpet by Mrs. Tryon's chair.

"It's fine," cried Marion jubilantly. "I thought it never would be. The rain was like a tiresome child that won't stop crying. But now, look, grace has descended." They went to the windows. "There's enough blue to make *une culotte de gendarme*, as my old French governess used to say. Shall we go out? Have you got thick shoes?"

She glanced at Mrs. Tryon's patent-leather toes peeping out from under her black accordion-pleated skirt. Marion did not feel sure whether her guests wanted to see anything of either house or garden, but the long habit of showing Foxley to all who came had become second nature. She did it mechanically, without gratification if they admired or resentment if they remained indifferent. She led the

way down the dark splendour of the staircase and out by the west door.

"*What a wind !*" exclaimed Mrs. Tryon, as a gust lifted the brim of her hat, trimmed with a wreath of velvet cherries. The breeze had sprung up suddenly to blow away the rain—the soaked delphiniums rocked in it perilously.

"As you have got this magic carpet—your brother's car—do you think you will really be able to come to the lecture here next week? You wrote to say you might."

"But of course we're coming. Luke, I didn't tell you about this exciting invitation. Miss Verlander has arranged some lectures at Foxley and I'm dying to hear them, but I didn't know whether Luke would be strong enough for them when I wrote to you."

"Will any of us be strong enough?" Marion asked wistfully. "I'm dreading what the neighbours will feel after they've been to the first. My father says I shall be burnt in effigy in the market-place of Brackenham, but I think they will only boycott me and not a soul will come to the second. I suppose I'm crazy to have thought of such a thing. People hate lectures anyway, and a lecture in French is Pelion on Ossa. You must have the lecture habit, Captain Vaughan, after

the Staff College ; you'll stand by me, won't you ? ”

“ Provided I am only a listener.”

“ Oh, you're not expected to ask intelligent questions or heckle. You need only remain passive, and a modicum of sleep is not objected to if you're not sitting too near the platform.”

“ How did you come to think of this ? ” Mrs. Tryon was holding on to the brim of her hat manfully. Her two jewelled hat-pins could not prevent it from rearing sideways. Now her hair-net had caught in her bangles and the buttons of her kid gloves. She did not cast a glance at park or gardens. Her other hand was holding her skirts in a bunch above the water-logged gravel.

“ Somebody—I think it was Lady Mabel Ransome—heard this woman lecture in Paris, and said she was excellent. Her subject is fascinating anyway, don't you think ? ”

“ Oh, of course the *subject* makes the whole difference,” Muriel Tryon murmured consolingly. She had torn her veil, but her right hand was freed. They walked up the stone steps of the Italian garden in single file.

“ Don't you think that something topical would have been more of a draw perhaps—‘ Life at the Mount Nelson Hotel,’ for instance, or ‘ The women

at the Front' ? Perhaps in that case I might have contributed a paper."

"Don't depress me, please. I've lost my nerve already and am praying that some act of God may intervene between now and next Friday." Marion was walking beside him, whilst his sister tagged along behind.

"Such as . . . ?"

"Well, Madame Grandchose might develop a cold—but that would only incapacitate her for a week; or we could have an epidemic of mumps in the house—that would last longer. It must be something that will put the lecturer, or me, out of action for the next six weeks. If I broke my leg on these steps—oh, do be careful, they *are* so slippery after the rain—I could then cancel the whole affair without losing face."

"But we're all looking forward to it—don't suggest such a disappointment," Mrs. Tryon panted.

They had reached the terrace at last, and paused to look down on the house. It lay like a brooding bird with grey wings outstretched. Beyond it the ground fell away steeply; and the eye took in the expanse of park, till it reached the ring of the distant woods, green against blue, as brilliant and translucent as Limoges enamel.

"It's extraordinary to see that feast of colour

again," said Vaughan quietly ; " it makes one blink after living in a monochrome world. White beds, white hospital walls, white nurses, and on the veldt khaki and sand . . . for ever."

But he made no comment on the house; its lace-like loveliness of detail, the twisted chimneys, the warmth of the lichen-covered roofs.

Marion did not expect anything more from him. She remembered now that he was like this : withdrawn, and at moments arrogant. It was the arrogance of youth, no doubt, for he was quite young under that mask of age which illness had laid on him. What could he be? Thirty at most. He must be many years younger than she. She watched him narrow his eyes against the sun and light a cigarette in the hollow of his palms. The match burned in their shelter like a flame in an alabaster lantern.

" I think tea will be ready by the time we get back to the house. Shall we go home by the stables ? "

Mrs. Tryon is obvious and voluble, Marion decided, as they walked on. Can he be fond of her? . . . Motors are doubtful blessings if they bring a whole new lot of people within distance. I can't love my neighbours as myself—I just can't. . . . In the old days at least one knew which of them to

expect, but now it's an unlimited liability. Why does she look as if she were old enough to be his mother? And that proprietary attitude must annoy him! How dreadful I am! I'm sure she's most awfully kind and genuine . . . genuinely boring.

She tried to recall what her father had told her of Mrs. Tryon. The widow of a Rear-Admiral, she had bought Frindlesham Manor from the Tenbys, who had been ruined in the Baring smash. The Admiral must have been happy when he was afloat! There were no children, fortunately (how dreadful they would have been—by an Admiral out of a Bore), and this said-to-be-brilliant brother of hers was probably heir to her fortune. He was quite different—only a half-brother, of course. His mother was said to have been a foreigner: French or German, Marion could not remember which. If his mother had been French that would make him well-disposed towards the lectures. Obviously his mother was dead, or she would not have left him to convalesce with Mrs. Tryon, unless she were a sadist. Mrs. Tryall, that should have been her name. Poor thing! How she was hating this walk, down the muddy drive in her good skirt and shoes and across the spongy lawn, with the wind ruining the brim of her hat. She must be longing to get back into the vandyke-brown motor-

car which was pulled up before the front door. Marion could see Sellars had come out to inspect it carefully, and now his gaze was beginning to explore the horizon for her—a sign that tea was ready, and that her father had returned.

“And so you see,” Mrs. Tryon droned on—she had been talking for a long time whilst Marion was not listening—“Luke has agreed to stay here anyway till after his next Medical Board. When is that, Luke? And we’re going to do lovely tours in his car. . . . Yes, of course it’s a French one. Next week we’re going down to the New Forest, but of course we shan’t start till after your lecture. Saturday—yes, Saturday we go to Lyndhurst, but we shall be back in time for Madame What’s-her-name’s second *conférence*.”

“Has Sir Thomas come?” Marion asked as she threw her coat off in the hall.

“Just returned, Miss.”

“Then we’ll have tea at once.” At once did not seem quick enough.

Luke Vaughan laid his cap and stick down carefully on the marble top of a fine Kent console. He was deliberate in all his movements. He had scarcely spoken all the way home. Sellars looked at him curiously. An enormous interest attached to all those who returned from South Africa.

L A T E S U M M E R

“How are they getting on out there, sir?” he enquired.

“We’ve got Brother Boer on the run.”

“And do they look like being beat shortly?”

“Oh no, they’re full of running—it will take time.”

“‘Slim,’ isn’t that what you call them, sir? My young nephew wrote it to me last mail.”

“What’s he with?”

“The Yeomanry.”

When Luke walked into the library Marion was pouring out tea.

“You remember Captain Vaughan, Papa?”

IV

THE day had dawned, milky mild ; no sunlight, but that was as well perhaps, though Foxley looked better when it shone. Marion had feared oppressive heat, which would have intensified the sufferings of those who had decided to attend the lectures and remain awake. The east drawing-room had been arranged for them ; dear old room, with its Elizabethan plaster-work frieze, faintly coloured, a naïve design of elephants, sportsmen, heavily antlered deer and lumbering horsemen.

Now the hated bent-wood chairs filled the room. The house carpenter had knocked together a deal platform which he had placed at one end. Sellars asked for a rug to clothe its shrimp-coloured nakedness. A table and two chairs were to stand there, he said.

“ Why two, Sellars ? We’re not going to listen to a duologue.”

“ One for the lecturer, and one for you, Miss ; you must introduce her, as Sir Thomas will be away.”

"Oh no, Sellars, I couldn't possibly do that, what should I say?"

What was there for her to say anyway except "alas and alack-a-day?" For this had been madness, sheer midsummer madness. How could she have imagined such a *divertissement*? The word jumped into her mind quite irrelevantly, as French words often did. *Divertissement* was used in ballet, she remembered. Mademoiselle Aubonne had frequently taken her to the Opera during her "finishing" year in Paris. Whilst the *corps de ballet* rested Adeline Genée, partnered by an equally heavy-legged *danseur*, had held the audience breathless. She visioned the lecturer executing pirouettes on that diminutive stage, arabesques, and *entre-chats*, or holding classic postures on her points. The absurdity of the thought brought another. "Do you think Marshall has made the platform strong enough?"

"For two ladies? Why, of course."

"One lady. I'm *not* going to get up on that. Put my walnut writing-chair behind the table, the one out of the boudoir."

"A glass of water?"

"Water, what for?"

"Speakers have to sip water, it helps the voice." Cold water, that was what Sellars was pouring on

her with every sentence. She felt he was doing so intentionally.

“Wouldn’t lemonade be nicer?”

“Can’t do that, Miss—it’s not usual.” But it was all so unusual and so preposterous! If only the up-shot of this afternoon produced a reasonable sum to be presented to the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Associations there might have been some sense in it.

“Will there be a collection?” he enquired, as if he were a thought-reader. She shook her head. A collection of the intellectuals of the county was all she could hope for. Perhaps the Berkshire papers next week would use the word in short paragraphs describing the event. “*Miss Marion Verlander gave a party last Friday at Foxley Place which was largely attended by a collection of the cultured gentry who live around. . . .*”

“Will you have some pot-plants, Miss, round the edge of the platform? They’ve got some nice ones in the stove-house.”

“Wouldn’t that look too much like church decoration?”

“It’s habitually done,” he murmured.

How was it Sellars knew the ritual? Perhaps after all this was not the departure from the conventional which she had imagined.

“Have you ever been in a house where this sort

of thing" (she swept the chairs and the stage with a gesture) "has been done before?"

"Not a private house, Miss, except, in course, for drawing-room meetings, but I've seen many public halls being prepared. As a rule speakers don't seem to appreciate their feet being seen when they are standing . . . prefer a screen of foliage and such-like—and then there is generally the foot-lights. . . ."

"Perhaps we'd better send a message to Dewar to conceal Madame Grandchose's feet unless . . . unless . . ." Unless she chooses to appear in tights and *tutu*, Marion was going to add, surrendering herself once more to the extravagant folly of her previous fancy. But Sellars could not be expected to follow that, so she left her sentence unfinished and hurried off to the dining-room to inspect the buffet—a long perspective of red felt, supported on rude trestles. (Buffet, indeed! It's a messenger of Satan sent to buffet me.) But in a few minutes Tansy would shroud it in one of the beautiful damask cloths woven with the Verlander coat of arms, *Joye sans fin* repeating itself interminably along the border. Exquisite napery, ironical motto! It would be exhumed from the linen-room where it lay embalmed in lavender by Tansy's sacramental hands. There were darns in these

hundred-year-old cloths of course, but they were magically wrought, the thread of the mender following the damask pattern. Later on Sellars would press the linen delicately with a cool flat-iron to erase all wrinkles.

Dewar joined her, in his *déshabillé*—a green baize apron, and shirt-sleeves.

“How do you wish the buffet decorated? Mr. Sellars thought the large silver epurge in the centre, and the glass vases down either side filled with ‘Mals.’”

“Not Malmaisons, Dewar, they look so . . . modern.”

“You surely don’t want anything that’s out of date? I can get you a nice cutting of the ‘Duchess of Fife’ . . . or if you prefer tea-roses . . .”

“Anything, anything will do,” she ended abruptly. The word “tea” had reminded her of the still-room; she must go there.

Jean McDougall had been “affronted.” Marion soothed her, while she inspected the cakes gleaming with festive pink-and-white icing. A crystallised cherry sat jauntily on each. The shortbread biscuits were prickly as fretful porcupines with sliced almonds. The cream buns and *éclairs* lay awaiting their foamy fillings.

“I canna understand the wumman,” Jean

grumbled disrespectfully, "stinting me of cream. Spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar."

"We'll get some more, Jean," Marion reassured her. "I'll send up to the dairy at once."

Marion was desperate as Bernard de Palissy when he burnt his furniture to fire his ceramics. Happy thought! The iced coffee might pull them through. Coffee was a well-known stimulant, but alcohol a stronger one. Had any been provided? "Sellars!" she called mournfully, "Sellars!" He appeared bearing the Queen Anne urn. It was as if the Ark of the Covenant were being removed from plate-chest to dining-room. "Sellars, we must have some hock-cup this afternoon."

"Cup, Miss? No, Miss, only for tennis parties, informal dances, christenings, picnics or luncheons." She was thwarted again, but the buffet was taking shape. A mosaic of cups patterned it. Such cups they were—Crown Derby at one end, and Rockingham at the other—a riot of emerald green, and flame and sapphire, all the poignant loveliness of old English flower gardens was painted on them.

"Can't we really have any wine? Some people will be coming such a long distance—it seems so inhospitable. Gentlemen might like it better than tea or coffee." Absurd subterfuge, for what men would be coming here to-day in spite of her brave bluff?

Sellars continued to shake his head, the subject was closed.

“The Madame, I understand, will be here about half-past two. Will she take anything before the lecture?”

Brandy perhaps for heroines—Marion would certainly have liked to join her in a *fine*.

Curious, this intermezzo. When she had first got up this morning there appeared to be no time for the execution of her many tasks, and now it was only twelve and her duties were accomplished. Like an orderly-officer she had finished her rounds, visited her pickets and her outposts. It felt suddenly as if the world had been drained of all occupation—the only one left her was to watch the hands of the clock. She went to the front door and stood there, idly, to watch the gardeners wheeling barrows laden with plants.

She conjured up the scene outside the house a few hours later, when this heavenly serenity would be shattered. She pictured the horses collaring up the last furlong of the drive. By the way, what would happen to them whilst the party was in train? Somebody must have thought of that. Sellars had probably discussed it with the stablemen. Old Reuben would stand by. (He had started as

a strapper at Foxley forty years ago, and a strapper he was still, bald and rubicund, at fifty-five.) There were only a few stalls available, it would have to be first-come-first-served. The carriage horses which could not be unharnessed and put on the pillar reins would be driven to the back of the house to wait in the lime avenue; lovely cool tents here would be furnished by the curtseying branches of the trees. The coachmen could doze on their boxes till they were offered beer in "Chatterbox" (the room set aside for casual callers). No one who came to Foxley ever went empty away. An aroma of stale beer and tobacco clung to its walls, and the oak benches were polished by constant contact with Bedford cord breeches and moleskin trousers.

On the whole Marion was grateful for this halt in time, unsought but welcome. It was pleasant to be doing nothing—not even thinking. With eyes closed, to feel the soft air on their lids, she leaned back on a stone seat under the saloon windows. A sense of unreality crept over her. Had she not been waiting like this always, just as the house had waited, through the centuries? Spell-binding house, enchanted gardens. The tall beech hedges flanking the grass paths never lost their leaves winter or summer, in order to enclose her more securely. The

maze in the topiary garden which had bewildered her before she was tall enough to look above its walls was another constant reminder that she could not escape.

She lunched on a tray in the library. Then Newman looked in at the door. "Are you going to change now, Miss?" Change she never would, and yet to-day there was a sense of expectancy.

On her bed three dresses were laid out; a choice was offered.

"Which will you wear?"

Which indeed? She would be the same whatever she put on. She asked for a hat, for she would have to go from house to garden during the afternoon. Just as she was fastening her belt she heard the carriage wheels.

"Quick, Newman, my brooch. Is that the brougham?"

She was in the hall by the time it drew up.

Madame Grandchose got out clumsily. Her gored foulard skirt belled out around her shapeless form. She had handed a portfolio to James before her high-heeled shoes tapped out their rhythm on the polished floor. Marion's gentle greeting was drowned in the Frenchwoman's animation. She was praising the park, the trees, the English landscape, the month of June, whilst Marion took

stock of her. An absurd flower-covered toque sat at a challenging angle on the fuzz of raven hair. Marion noticed the eloquence of her hands in their white kid gloves. Was there something just a little grotesque about her appearance? Would the neighbours laugh? But the woman's obvious intelligence triumphed. Like the absurd *chapeau fermé* it defied all criticism.

They passed into the drawing-room. "Is this arranged as you like it? Please make any suggestions, Madame. That table for your notes, is it too low for you when you stand?"

"I don't stand, Mademoiselle, ever—it is ageing to stand, and injures the organs, especially the heart and *les intestins*. Apart from that, the lecturer who stands will fall. I like my lectures to be intimate, to talk as I am talking to you now—between four eyes, as we say in France. What is it, after all, that we are going to do this afternoon? Discuss old friends, are we not, as we discuss them always with protestations of affection and a little malice; as we shall talk scandal but not ill-naturedly (*les absents ont toujours tort*), we must slide over all their frailties and recall as many of their fine qualities as we can crowd into one little hour."

Marion felt she must disillusion the lecturer. "But, Madame, I fear, down here in the country, we

know very little about these distinguished French-women except their names."

"It doesn't matter; after I have presented them to you, they will become familiar as your neighbours. The gentlemen who are coming to-day will not be disinclined to improve their acquaintance with one or two pretty women. . . ."

Marion flinched. "I don't think many men will be able to come this afternoon . . . they are so busy . . . the war, you know!" She was mortified.

Madame Grandchose had gone up to the stage.

"Might I beg for these to be removed?" She pointed to the plants. "I like no barrier—not even one of flowers—between myself and my audience. There is something infinitely delicate between speaker and listener, a cobweb holds them together."

James removed the offending pots, the French-woman directing him. Her reason for discarding them was explained to the footman in fluent English. She was obviously bilingual. Marion breathed a sigh of relief. Sellars, rather flushed, looked through the half-open door.

"The carriages are just coming up the drive, Miss."

Madame Grandchose chuckled. She distended her nostrils, and took a deep breath.

The first guest to be shown in was Luke Vaughan. Marion was relieved to see he was not accompanied by his sister. Others now seeped steadily into the saloon, and after shaking hands with her, sat down furtively on the chairs furthest removed from the platform.

Madame Grandchose got on to it awkwardly, but the audience did not notice her ungainly movements, they were too busy settling themselves into the rows in such a manner as to baulk late-comers from reaching the inside seats.

Marion kept urging friends to sit next each other, and was busy moving the old and deaf nearer the speaker, and shifting the delicate ones out of the draught. The Duchess had turned up after all, and was led to a seat of honour by Sellars, who was hovering, light as Ariel, between the drawing-room and the front door. The lecturer established herself in a leisurely way, disposing her notes on the table in careful piles. She was engrossed in arranging her figured foulard into becoming folds after she sat down. Then she patted her crisp hair and gave a more marked list to her flower-crowned toque.

The room was not full by any means, but there were enough listeners to satisfy honour. It was decided, by signal, to give a few moments' grace to loiterers, whose voices could be heard in the hall.

Then somebody said "Hush" and the room lapsed into silence. A cuckoo was calling desperately in the garden, repeating its minor third till a wood-pigeon, incensed, replied in gurgling rondos. Marion hoped the birds would not distract—she had never heard them more vociferous. Madame Grandchose rose to her feet.

"Mesdames, Messieurs," she began (her voice had a pretty woody note, like an oboe, not unlike a cuckoo's), "for these two *causeries* I am not going to observe chronological order: if I did I should have to devote my first lecture to Madame Récamier, as she belongs to a slightly earlier era, but the lady I am introducing to you to-day was an Englishwoman by birth, and as it is to an English audience I am speaking, she shall have pride of place. At the battle of Fontenoy it is said that our musketeers powdered their hair and arranged their jabots, saying to the British troops opposing them, '*Messieurs les Anglais, tirez les premiers.*' I hasten to follow such a courteous example from my compatriots. Before I go further, let me thank Miss Verlander for having given me the opportunity of visiting this beautiful house and park. You know what we French think of the English gardens. The traditions of your country are written in your spreading trees, your velvet lawns. The setting of

our châteaux is different—you have seen them. Alleys of pleached limes, stone-edged *bassins*, groups of statuary. . . .

“ Parks and gardens are expressions of national character. In what I see around me to-day I read the history of your nation.

“ And now forget that you are writing ‘ 1900 ’ on your writing-paper ; put yourselves back a hundred years, and in the quiet of this lovely room and bird-haunted landscape you may catch the echoes of the tumults and the clamours from my unhappy country at that time.

“ One more request I will make—I want you to accept without challenge the position which *la femme* holds in France. It is a little delicate for a woman to assert it, but to state a fact is a purely impersonal matter, so you see I do not blush ! ”

That was true, she was as pale, as self-possessed as when she had first greeted Marion. She encamped herself in her elbow-chair and drew a handkerchief from her reticule. (“ Business,” that’s the stage term, how cunningly she understands it ! thought Marion.) She dropped her eyes on her notes, her timing was flawless. The room was all attention.

“ *Je commence.* ”

V

“MARY, you are as impudent as a highwayman’s horse !”

That was what her grandmother said to the little girl who would some day be Madame Julius Mohl. The phrase, remembered throughout her long life, gives us an eighteenth-century setting.

We can see the heavy stage-coaches, rumbling along the King’s highway. Whilst the travellers are emptying their pockets, covered by the pistols of a highwayman, his horse pokes his nose in at the window and with blowing nostrils and bold eyes surveys the inside passengers impudently—for hasn’t he seen scores of terror-stricken old men, women and children, on a lonely stretch of road, on a dark night, held up to ransom by his master ?

But you would like to know the date of Mary Clarke’s birth ? I ought not to disclose it, for on this subject she observed reticence. Her only coquetry was to ignore her age, but I cannot humour her. It was not a difficult date to remember at that time anyway. France called it the year One, the first year of the new Calendar of Liberty. From Floréal to

Thermidor the tumbrils, laden for the harvest of the guillotine, had laboured through the streets of Paris. Danton had stood watching them as they passed, "*Il leur faisait un adieu de la main, avec un sourire.*" It was during the Terror in 1793 that Mary Clarke was born.

Her maternal grandparents, Captain and Mrs. Hay, like many Scottish families in those times, lived at Dunkerque, but were driven out of France by the menacing clouds which presaged the Revolution. They abandoned their home hastily to seek safe refuge in Westminster. It was here that Mary's mother married her Irish husband, Andrew Clarke. But having spent all her girlhood abroad the bride found it impossible to strike root in Great Britain ; after her first child was born she returned to France, though she could not persuade Andrew Clarke to do so. It was decided, therefore, that father and mother should divide the care of the two girls—Eleanor, the eldest, was first taken to Toulouse, whilst Mary was left in charge of her father, and after this nestling was fully fledged, it was Mary's turn to go out to France with her mother and Granny Hay, so that she might enjoy the advantages of a mild climate and a convent upbringing.

After Mr. Clarke's death his widow and the

younger daughter came to Paris to install themselves there permanently, for Eleanor (an exquisite creature) was married at an early age to a Leicestershire squire thirty years older than herself, and was already established in his grey Jacobean manor, Cold Overton.

Let us follow Mary to Paris, to her home there in the rue Bonaparte—it was called rue des Petits-Augustins in those days—one of the many serpentine streets which wind about on the left side of the Seine. A street composed of a medley of small shops, large *hôtels* with their gardens and courtyards, and apartment houses, that patchwork of habitations which Paris was and ever will be.

Of course they knew nobody when they first arrived, old Granny Hay, Mrs. Clarke, and sixteen-year-old Mary. Rather a helpless trio of women, one would have thought, with only some letters of introduction from David Hume, a friend of the family, to put them in touch with interesting Frenchmen of the day. But where Mary was, it would have been impossible to remain lonely or defenceless.

A series of classic rows with their landlord soon decided them to seek another apartment, and what could be more attractive than those in the Abbaye au Bois, rented to ladies by the community of nuns called Les Dames Chanoinesses de St. Augustin.

Large gardens surrounded the convent, and tall trees shaded the gravelled paths where the Sisters walked, reading their office. The longest branches of an acacia, impudent as the highwayman's horse or as Mary herself, brushed the windows of the rooms where Madame Récamier lived, withdrawn from the outer world into a little sanctuary of her own.

Mary knew that this magical person, whose very name made her thrill, wished to lease one of her apartments in the Abbaye, and she pressed her mother to inspect it. This would give her an opportunity of making acquaintance with the beautiful lady.

Madame Récamier had lived in the Abbaye au Bois since 1819. The second financial failure of her banker-husband had obliged her to give up her magnificent house in the rue du Mont Blanc. The convent, pressed for money, had sold several of its large exterior apartments, so Madame Récamier had at first to content herself with a very small one—it was nicknamed her "*cellule*." Later she hired one *entre cour et jardin*, which was more spacious, but noisy, till she could obtain possession of the handsomest in the building, for which her father, Monsieur Bernard, paid 30,000 francs. Once she was able to move into this, she

wished to find tenants for the rooms she was leaving, and having heard, through mutual friends, of Mrs. Clarke and her daughter, they were invited to inspect the apartment. By adjusting the rent to suit the Clarkes' modest budget, Madame Récamier secured them as her tenants for seven years.

Mother and daughter started off on a cold, windy day in 1831 to visit her, the younger woman all agog with excitement at the prospect, the older one far more concerned as to whether the rooms would meet their requirements. These age-old bothers with querulous landlords and disagreeable concierges were as tiresome then as they are to-day.

How often when I think of Mary Clarke do I imagine her first meeting with Juliette Récamier ! I see the soft light of afternoon pouring in through the long windows of the drawing-room. The blue silk chaise-longue is there, just as we see it in her portrait by Gérard, bookcases on either side, and on the *boiserie* walls are hung the pictures which accompanied her on all her wanderings. The early nineteenth-century grace which you English people connect with the names of Adam, Sheraton, and Wedgwood, is reflected in the room : and Madame Récamier's personality had something of the same cold classical purity as the designs which belong to her period.

Mary Clarke fell at once a victim to her charm, and no doubt there was an unconventionality in the speech and manners of the English woman which surprised and fascinated her hostess. She had already heard a great deal about the sparkling intelligence of this person who was affectionately spoken of by the circle which surrounded her as "la chère Miss." She had learnt through Fauriel, Cousin, and Thiers, of some of her mad pranks and practices. But can we imagine a sharper contrast than the spontaneity of this child of Nature with the finished perfection of that goddess-like being whose beauty placed her on a pedestal?

It was greatly to the credit of Madame Récamier that she, herself so *stylée*, should instantly have appreciated the wit which sparkled in Mary's wide blue eyes, and have guessed that under the tangled mop of curls escaping from her poke bonnet was a brain of outstanding quality, and that the pelisse which clothed the agile body concealed a heart of intense sensibility.

Mary must have come into that calm room like an ardent sunray; the older woman began, at once, to warm her hands before the radiant flame of the younger life. This was the prelude to a long and tender relation between the two, which lasted till the day of Madame Récamier's death. It

was through her that Mary learned the arts of a *maîtresse de salon*. She could not fill the rôle with the same subtle grace as her instructress—no one could do that. Often in after years she may have echoed the sigh of Madame de Staël, "*J'ai mal conduit la conversation ce soir*," but she certainly acquired, what was more essential to the success of her own future salon, the same magic power of holding friends together.

Years afterwards, in answer to a letter in which somebody enquired as to the outcome of that first meeting at the Abbaye, Mary Mohl wrote that Madame Récamier conceived "quite a passion for me and used to come for the first two or three years to my apartment bringing all those who came to her, and as our salon was large she invited her company there, and I made tea."

So the entirely English habit of tea-drinking, bringing as it does a sense of intimacy, invaded the circle of the Abbaye au Bois. The kettle was brought to the hearth, to be perched on the logs above a little hotbed of glowing embers prepared for it. Philosopher, historian, encyclopaedist or poet cajoled it to boil. The guests grouped in that classic circle round which winds the golden thread of French conversation, sipped their pretty Sèvres cups, and sat long and late, till the sky

above the gardens of the convent turned from blue to saffron, till the spire of Sainte Clothilde and the more distant dome of the Invalides lost themselves in the veils of gathering dusk. The good-byes said when darkness fell were only *à demains*, for those gathered here could not live without daily intercourse. Life to them was a chaplet to which each day adds a pearl.

Let us enquire a little into Mary Clarke's life before this fateful meeting. The years in Paris had already furnished her with many admirers. Quinet the historian and Thiers were the most persistent of these. The gatherings in the rue des Petits-Augustins started at seven o'clock and lasted often till midnight. As the hours stole by the room was lit by the wood fire only. Mrs. Clarke retired to her bed, and Mary was left with one or other of her swains. We are told that "*Quand elle était avec un de ses admirateurs ils ne parlaient guère que de leur amour. Tout ce qu'on pouvait espérer le soir était d'arriver le premier ou de rester le dernier.*" Small wonder Thiers outstayed the others! Thiers had made friends with her when he first came from Marseilles to seek his future in Paris. When Mrs. Clarke, anxious to assist him in finding work, questioned him as to his capabilities, "*Je sais manier la plume,*" was his answer. It was through

her that he obtained his first opportunity in journalism. The old curmudgeon of a concierge (whose bad temper eventually decided the Clarkes to seek another apartment) grumbled that if "*ce petit étudiant*" did not leave the house earlier he would lock the front door and leave him to spend the night on the staircase. Did he, I wonder, live long enough to see that little student acclaimed as the Saviour of France after the Franco-Prussian War, or read the words addressed to him, "*L'Europe vous attend*"?

Mérimée was another of her early friends. He explained the frequency of his visits (and their length) on the score that he was practising his English. Mrs. Clarke was at pains to teach him, but Mary only laughed at his mistakes.

De Tocqueville, Cousin, Benjamin Constant, Mignet and Fauriel made up the group around her, and there was another who played a quiet but important part in these gatherings. This was Julius von Mohl, the Orientalist, who came from his native Württemberg to pursue his studies in Arabic, Chinese and Persian, more especially to translate the works of the Persian poet Firdousi.

Soon after his arrival he had met Jean-Jacques Ampère (son of the scientist who has given his name to the unit of electricity). Ampère dazzled

the shy retiring German by his brilliance and versatility. These two scholars made common cause, living together in blissful poverty, for neither had any resources. Mohl had brought his tiny patrimony from Germany tied up in a stocking, and hoped it might last out his student days. This did not prevent him from lending more than half of it to a friend in distress.

Julius von Mohl, however, was not the one who, in those early days, arrested Mary Clarke's attention. She bestowed on him no more than she gave to others, her radiant smile, her witty nonsense, and her pointed comments. He was nevertheless a slave to all her whims and moods, but there must have been days of discouragement for him when he looked on at her ever-growing intimacy with Claude Fauriel.

Her affection for Fauriel was set in that border country where love and friendship meet. In their correspondence the reader can watch their delicate advances and retreats ; *balancés*, as in a dance in which neither can decide to join hands for the final figure. Fauriel, twenty years older than Mary, was said to be much in love with the widow of Condorcet, the Girondin—and others.

He had first met the Clarkes whilst in Switzerland in company with the poet Manzoni, who

persuaded them to come on to Milan to stay with him.

In the Manzoni's household Mary's affection for him changed to something deeper, though she admits that she was so light-hearted at this time that she often preferred a game of Blind-Man's-Buff with the poet's children to the more staid pleasure of listening to the conversation between the two poets.

It is only a step from Milan to Venice, where Fauriel was going. He induced the Clarkes to make it with him. More pearls must be added to the chaplet of the days—he was unwilling to interrupt such delightful philandering. But the travelling scholar's blood was in his veins, Venice was only the first stage of a long journey he proposed to make in Greece, where he had already begun the work which was to make him famous—four volumes of translations of Greek folklore. Fauriel turned from the primrose path of love to the stony roads of literary research.

His letters to Mary at this time became few and far between. Her replies show how eagerly she awaited them. "I am often so melancholy that I could die of it," she writes from her sister's house at Cold Overton, "but my life would be very pleasant if I had letters from you. I think, too, over many

things that you said to me in the winter. Perhaps you have forgotten them. Very likely indeed, for they were far more important to me than to you. For the matter of that we are continually killing and giving life by our words without suspecting it." This letter, taken at random from their voluminous correspondence, allows us to see that in all the bewildering flitting and hovering of the moths around the bright candle which was Mary, there was, so far, only one who she hoped might singe his wings—not painfully, of course—but enough to immobilise them. She wanted to keep him beside her always.

In 1844 Fauriel died, and it was Julius von Mohl who nursed him through his last illness. What his death meant to Mary Clarke, Mohl realised too well. Thanking Manzoni for having sent her a portrait of her dead friend, he wrote, "You could not have done anything more agreeable to the person who loved Fauriel more than all the world besides, and who is suffering more than anyone else."

After this mutual loss, however, he believed that he might enter into a closer relationship with her; though it was her anguish only that he was considering. Completely selfless, he thought of nothing but to solace her.

The writer had left all his unfinished manuscripts and unpublished lecture-notes to her ("*aux soins éclairés de Miss Clarke*"). The publication of these was a task in which Mohl could help, something which would enhance the memory of one of whom Renan wrote that of all men in the nineteenth century, he had "*mis en circulation le plus d'idées, inauguré le plus de branches d'études.*" A volume on Provençal poetry, and another on Dante, were the outcome of their joint labours of love.

Perhaps it was necessary for such a soul as Mary's to pass through the refining fire of sorrow to become worthy of such a man as Julius von Mohl. Life had been so far for her an irresponsible adventure. Skies had been blue by day, starlit by night. She had lived inebriated by wit, by friends, by talk. Two years after Claude Fauriel's death she had to bear another grief. Her mother, a gentle, shadowy presence at the corner of that gay hearth, passed away, and Mary for the first time felt herself utterly alone.

In 1847 she had the supreme satisfaction of seeing Julius von Mohl appointed Professor of Persian at the Collège de France, and in the same year Prosper Mérimée received from him this short note : "*Mon cher Mérimée,—J'ai un service à vous*

demander, faites-moi le plaisir de venir demain à dix heures me servir de témoin."

Now *témoin*, of course, means witness, but it may also mean a second in a duel. The idea that this dreamy scholar (dwelling in what he described as "a Faustus-like cavern" amongst his piles of precious books) should fight a duel, appeared preposterous. How could he hope to settle matters with a rapier? But men do strange things, and chivalry was an intrinsic part of his character. Mérimée trembled. What must have been his relief when the true facts came to light! Julius von Mohl and Mary Clarke were to be married, and Mérimée in this note was being invited to sign the register.

So these two, admirably suited to each other, yet kept apart for more than twenty years, were to embark on a voyage all the more rapturous because so long delayed. Their boat was built of seasoned timbers—not one of those frail cockleshells for which the open sea might prove too strong. It was Mary's fault, of course, that they had let it ride so long at anchor; she knew this, though she once wrote to him, "Had you understood me six or seven years ago, you would have spared me incalculable pain. But may God forgive you, for you also have been punished enough—too much."

Not understood her! It was through his exquisite gift of understanding that their ultimate bliss was reached.

I have told you already that Mary Clarke resented any allusion to her age. When the civil marriage was being performed at the Mairie and she was asked what this was, she is said to have replied, "Monsieur le Maire, I shall if necessary throw myself out of the window, but I will not tell it you." It had, however, to be disclosed before the *contrat* was completed, so the bridegroom blew his nose loud and long at that moment, in order to spare her feelings.

Though I hate to remind you of it myself, I must point out that she was more than fifty at this time and her husband was seven years younger. But, ladies and gentlemen, what has that got to do with the matter? Time is a man-made measure, capable of infinite expansion or contraction, and it is our ingratitude which makes happiness appear short and sorrow long, for we should give to one hour of joy the time-value of ten thousand :

*"Only our love hath no decay :
This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day."*

I have found these lines amongst the verses of your poet Donne.

Mary's self-consciousness about her wedding caused her to conceal it even from her servants. She told them she was going to Switzerland, and bribed a gamin to paste a playbill over the notice on the church door. She left her husband in the porch, gave the wrong number of her house to the cabman, so that she might not be seen alighting ; took off her fine clothes and her wedding ring and packed her possessions. It was not till two days later that she started off on her honeymoon. " And then," she would relate, " luckily for me, the Duc de Praslin murdered his wife, and everybody talked about that and forgot me and my marriage."

Of course it was a little doubtful at first how the great Orientalist would fit into the apartment at 120 rue du Bac to which the Clarkes had moved after they left the Abbaye au Bois. It was shabby and threadbare, full of English comfort, devoid of French elegance. One of the salons was immediately made over to Julius and his litter of priceless books and manuscripts. Four layers of carpets had covered these treasures, stacked on the floor, when he lived in his " cavern." The larger room had always been reserved for her most distinguished visitors. The intellectuals here were not the least disturbed by the

dancing which the juveniles enjoyed in the dining-room. Blind-Man's-Buff was played here too, to remind Madame Mohl of her own frolics in the Manzoni's household, when all the world was young. Often Julius would open the door to watch them. This is how Sainte-Beuve describes him : "*Esprit clair, loyal, étendu, esprit allemand passé au filtre anglais, sans un trouble, sans un nuage, miroir ouvert et limpide, moralité franche et pure . . . avec un grain d'ironie sans amertume. Front chauve, et rire d'enfant.*" This childlike laugh of his often rang out in both rooms, his company was equally desired in either. The only other change at 120 rue du Bac, henceforth, was the day of the week when the doors of the salon were thrown wide to callers.

Shall we leave them, gathered round Madame von Mohl in her deep chairs (she detested inhospitable French seats and maintained that comfortable English sofas and easy-chairs contributed to the brilliance of conversation), to glance for a moment at the historical panorama of those times ? Mary's sister, Eleanor, making her first journey through France, had seen the children of Louis XVI playing mournfully in the gardens of the Tuileries after their return from the flight to Varennes, but Mary did not remember that, though she had a lively recollection of being lifted on to the charger of a

burly dragoon to watch the triumphal entry of the Allies into Paris in 1814. The ignoble drama of the Restoration was enacted before her eyes, and in talking of her we are obliged to take stock of it.

It seems strange to me that this period, so near to our own, is not more familiar to you English people. You should take the trouble to study those blood-stained pages and compare them to the clean ones which record your tranquil Stuart Restoration. Such comparison would afford you that sense of—dare I say smug?—satisfaction which warms the cockles of your British hearts.

Let us begin then with the year when Mary, in the arms of the trooper, saw the victorious procession of the armies which had broken Napoleon, the year Louis XVIII was proclaimed King.

The brother of the martyred monarch was already old and enfeebled. He had spent twenty-two years in exile, wandering from place to place, driven like chaff under the flail of the Corsican conqueror, till after the Peace of Tilsit, in 1807, no sanctuary in Europe was left to him but England. He retired there to live in obscurity at Hartwell, though his ceaseless intrigues with foreign potentates and his feverish attempts to restore his late brother's throne did not abate.

After the French Senate had proclaimed the downfall of Napoleon, Louis was invited to return to France, but it was not loyalty to the Monarchy that inspired the invitation which Talleyrand tendered and two hundred thousand foreign bayonets on French soil were ready to endorse. Louis paid off old scores by signing a savage treaty with the Allies and by accepting the famous Charter—thrown together, as somebody said, as hastily and irresponsibly as the text of a comic opera. The latter, I must say, was a little blue-pencilled by Louis before he graciously conceded this emasculated form of constitution to a disillusioned and war-weary people. In it the King reserved the right to sanction and promulgate laws, in him was vested the right of proposing them to the Chambers. These consisted of the Chamber of Peers (life members or hereditary holders of the title), and of the Chamber of Deputies, elected for five years. Such vexed problems as the administration of justice, the liberty of the Press, the inviolability of property acquired during the Revolution, were defined in ambiguous terms ; but the principles of absolute monarchy underlay the whole.

This is not the moment to give you more than the briefest outline of the reign of Louis XVIII.

The task which lay before him was one of superhuman difficulty—the staunching of the wounds which calamity and wars had inflicted on France since the Revolution. Moderation and prudence were the only simples which could heal these. He attempted to apply them, but there were too many factions to conciliate. After the assassination of his son, the Duc de Berry, the dismissal of his two enlightened ministers, the Duc Decazes and the Duc de Richelieu, was forced upon him by the Ultra-Royalist party. He could put up no further resistance to them ; discouraged, disillusioned, and diseased, death claimed the throne of France for his successor.

Charles X had been in pre-Revolutionary days an elegant, glamorous figure. At the age of sixty-seven he was as much a reactionary as he had been at the Trianon when the court ladies sighed, “Artois is our only hope !” The Revolution had taught him nothing. “I would rather chop wood than reign after the fashion of the Kings of England,” he had often declared. The Ultras saw their chance. They pressed at once for indemnities for their confiscated properties, determined to revive the letter and the spirit of the *ancien régime*. It was a straight fight now between the sovereignty of the Crown and the will of the People. For ten

years the ambiguous clauses in the Charter had stood the Ultras in good stead.

In 1830 the Chamber was dissolved by the King, the electoral system was curtailed, most of the Ultras having received the plums of office, and the Press was gagged. Thiers, "that little student" who had aroused the wrath of Mary's concierge, declared in the name of his fellow-journalists that "the rule of Law is at an end, and that of Force has begun." Shouts of "Down with the Bourbons!" rang through the streets, yet Charles X was not perturbed; in his opinion a little further juggling with the Chamber and the members of his Cabinet, and the rescinding of the provocative "Ordinances" (flagrant misinterpretations of the Charter), would put the barometer back at "Fair."

He had, however, overlooked the presence at the Palais-Royal of the Duc d'Orléans, son of the infamous Philippe Egalité, who had ever been careful not to associate himself with the Royalists, and had made his palace a rendezvous of those men who were in the bad books of the Tuileries. The Duke had sought strenuously to popularise himself with the bourgeoisie, going so far as to educate his sons at ordinary schools. At this moment of crisis, Thiers hastened to his summer residence and summoned him to Paris. Charles X,

bowing before the storm, had already abdicated for himself and the Duc d'Angoulême, requesting only that his grandson, the child of the assassinated Duc de Berry, should be proclaimed as Henry V.

The son of Egalité, no doubt remembering his father's fate, answered the call to Paris somewhat gingerly, but on the following day Liberal deputies appointed him Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom. In a proclamation delivered at the Hôtel-de-Ville he declared that "the Charter would henceforth be a reality." There was no enthusiasm amongst the masses for a pledge which had so long been a bone of contention and a meatless bone at that. The crowds looked surly, till a window was thrown open and Louis-Philippe appeared at it, holding the Tricolour flag, with La Fayette beside him, whom he embraced. The sight of these colours, which in after years were described as having "*fait le tour du monde avec le nom, la gloire et la liberté de la patrie*," and the token of that kiss bestowed on the champion of Liberty in the Old World and the New, turned the scale in favour of the Duc d'Orléans. Nothing remained now but to get rid of Charles X.

His relative wrote to him, advising him to leave whilst the door stood open. A sample of what might be in store if he delayed his departure was

sent to his château of Rambouillet—a rabble of armed men dragging shabby vehicles behind them, exact counterpart of that ugly procession which had marched on Versailles in 1789. This argument was too strong. Dignified as his family had always been, Charles X, last of that tragic band of brothers, set off by night for lifelong exile, and Louis-Philippe was proclaimed King of France. The legitimate line having been tried again and found wanting, right divine was to be replaced with right by contract.

I must ask your indulgence for this *cours d'histoire*. I do so to provide a background for my portrait of Madame Mohl. I do so also because there may be in this room a few people who remember so little about this period of French history as to imagine Louis XVI to have been the last Bourbon king, and who, if I mentioned Charles X, might imagine I was referring to some mythical Valois sovereign. I am not censuring them; I have always held that history should be learned backwards. As it is, we are long-sighted people who can only read what is far removed from our eyes, so forgive me to-day for offering “clearing” lenses for the spectacles of those who need them. I will now put away my improvised lesson-book, as we have reached the year when Mary Clarke and her mother moved into the Abbaye au Bois. Staunch Liberals both of

them, they must have welcomed the advent of the democratic king, "*le roi Citoyen*," as he loved to be called. *La jeune France* had always been represented in their salon at the convent, and the same group had followed them when they moved to the rue du Bac.

And now let us examine the qualities which enabled Mary to hold her unique position in French Society. Remember she was neither rich nor beautiful, nor high-born, remember above all that she was an English woman. She owed her salon to her charm. She held her circle of intellectuals by her skill in directing their conversation, and her friends by her unwavering loyalty and glowing heart. She never attempted to impress by her own brilliance; indeed she discounted it. Writing once about some problem so complex as to be beyond her comprehension, she confesses, "I don't understand, but then I'm an ass, so I bow my long-eared head and bray."

Though she possessed an inexhaustible vigour of mind and body, there were moments of depression after her marriage, when she deplored her years—not that anyone was conscious of their tale. "If I could catch back twenty years I should walk upon clouds. I shall leave all my undertakings not half

fulfilled, not a quarter. If I could steal the life and youth out of some fool, I would. Oh, for the Philosopher's stone, not for gold but for days !” And in another letter she accuses herself of being “ridiculously and basely fond of living.”

Perhaps in these complaints there is revelation of a heart-ache over those twenty lost years during which her husband had waited for her. But these had given her a patina, if I may say so, which made her doubly precious in his eyes. Her maturity of judgment, however, destroyed nothing of that impetuosity of speech which she herself often deplored. Something of that same spontaneous quality never died in Julius von Mohl either.

What did it matter that, when they married, the road of life had begun to slope downwards?—it was easier walking. What did it signify that the sun was past its meridian?—the breezes are cooler at this hour. Perhaps in my country as in no other we can read the hour of romance on a sundial which stands in the shade. In France the *métier de femme* is too well understood to require anything more than delicate adjustment with the passage of time. It is like the seasons, which disclose fresh beauties with every change in the calendar.

Until Madame Récamier died, every afternoon

still found Mary at the Abbaye, and every afternoon Chateaubriand, now paralysed, was carried there from his apartment on the ground floor of the house occupied by the Mohls. Madame Récamier had for a long while past depended on Mary's wit and vitality to stimulate the poet-philosopher; as her own eyes dimmed, it was through the younger woman's that she watched the lights and shadows of emotion flit across his majestic features. She waited impatiently for Mary's knock, fearing lest ennui should overtake him. Chateaubriand dreaded this more than any physical pain. He said he wished it might settle in his leg, for then it could be amputated. But when Mary entered, his fondling of the cat or his toying with the bell-rope—dread symptoms of tedium—ceased.

Madame Récamier's life left a deep impression on Madame Mohl, and for those who had never known her, or had not appreciated her great qualities, she wrote some years later a short monograph on her friend. She decided to do this after the appearance of a biography written by her niece, Madame Le Normant, which in Mary Mohl's opinion was not a faithful portrait.

But she is full of misgivings on the subject, fearing to send her manuscript to a competent judge. "I must not have a critic that is too severe,"

she writes, "as they discourage me, and I throw it aside and can't work. It is a thing not sufficiently considered that animal spirits are the first ingredient for doing anything. Criticism entirely stops the current, at least with me. I'm convinced that is the reason why art is so brilliant at its birth. There are no critics. The artist goes on helter-skelter, enjoying his creations." She decided, however, to submit her work to Mrs. Gaskell, and asked her to give it "a good pencil scratch." They were close friends, and part of the novel *Wives and Daughters* was written in the rue du Bac.

The delay in connection with the publication of the monograph infuriated her. "That wretch of a publisher having kept my manuscript I don't know how long, says it can't be published before October. Now I had just as soon put it in the fire. I may be dead by that time. He talks some stuff about the season, forsooth—as if books were fish and could only be ate at one time! If anyone promised me anything—Paradise itself—next year, I wouldn't thank them. I hate next year. *Je veux entrer dans mon avenir tout de suite.*"

So authorship was not the bed of roses Mary Mohl had anticipated. Commenting on her stay in England that year, she writes, "The first month I had the toothache, and the second month I had

the proofs." She complained of her husband's indifference to her writing : he laughed at her absorption in her task—"I might as well be playing the flute."

Those who read her charming little work will realise that, though English is her birthright, she expresses herself more freely and correctly in her adopted tongue. De Tocqueville described her French as exquisite. Frequently she borrows a word from either language to translate the exact shade of her meaning, but in both, her style is intensely lively and intimate. To read her is to know her.

All her life she kept in close contact with her native country, visiting her sister every year in Leicestershire, receiving numbers of English friends and acquaintances in her salon and begging them to stay with her whilst in Paris. A great deal in English social and political life commended itself to her, but at heart she was French, though her mind was too open not to see the frailties and imperfections of the country of her choice. Her long correspondence with Dean Stanley and his wife Lady Augusta, Lady William Russell, Miss Hilary Bonham-Carter, and the Nightingale family (Parthenope Nightingale, sister of Florence, was her dear friend), is full of astute comments on the differences between the two countries. She

remained a true lover of her own. When she lands on her native soil she confesses that she is always on the point of "kissing the dear free earth," if she were not afraid of being ridiculous, "but I'd rather *live here*" (France).

She adored country-house life in England, riding with her nieces at Cold Overton, or taking long walks with them and their dogs, helping them with their water-colours ; an excellent artist herself, a table was always laid ready for her, furnished with paints and brushes. These much-loved nieces paid return visits to her in the rue du Bac. This gave her an opportunity to correct the gauche ways of English girls, which she deplored. She writes that she has turned herself into a drill-sergeant and is dragooning them with "Hold up your heads ; answer in a soft voice ; don't look crusty ; don't see-saw when you walk." All morality, she adds, is excluded from her admonitions, "like Lord Chesterfield, I think of nothing but deportment."

Towards the end of each day, wherever she was, but especially when staying with friends, she retired to her own room for solitude and reading. "If there were no more books, the best thing to do would be to hang oneself, for life would not be worth living. . . . I must have several hours alone, or I am knocked up, as tired as fifty dogs. Seeing

people at stated hours never fatigues me like that dripping twaddle called conversation. I always lock myself up many hours in my room at Cold Overton, and when I come out I am full of spirits, but the others are worn out." After having made herself over in this way with what she called "a nourishing book," she would take off her nightgown (which had been slipped over her dress to ensure more complete privacy) and come down to dinner with mind and curls fresh, crisp and ordered. Ah, mesdames, what felicity is in that phrase, "the dripping twaddle called conversation"! How often I could accuse myself of it.

Having lived through the earthquake which shook Charles X off his throne, it appeared unlikely that Mary Mohl should experience another. Yet in February 1848 Paris awoke once again to the terrifying clamour of the tocsin. "I can't describe what I felt on Wednesday night near twelve as I was sitting over the fire alone reading. I heard the tocsin down the chimney. No English can understand the horror of the sound ; every great massacre of the Revolution was ushered in by it ; and in my childhood, when talk of the Revolution was in everyone's mouth, the impression made was so black that the very word makes me shudder."

The maladministration of Louis - Philippe's

government had sold the pass to the Republicans. Street fighting and barricades in Paris, all the horrors and devastation of civil war, were to continue for five months. It was characteristic of the spiritual survivors of eighteenth-century society that these tragic commotions did not interrupt social gatherings. The friends still kept their daily trysts. When order was re-established in June, Madame Mohl sighed, "*Nous sommes en République.*"

She had always entertained a sincere admiration for Louis-Philippe, and believed the French to have been fools to turn him out. But the *coup d'état* which established on the Imperial throne of France a man for whom she held an undying hatred and contempt was a still worse blow for her. She never hereafter spoke of Louis Napoleon as the Emperor, alluding to him always as "le Monsieur," with a scornful backward gesture of her thumb, or as "our Brummagem Boney," or simply "that fellow."

As a protest to everything connected with the Second Empire, whilst all Europe was following the fashions set by Eugénie, she did not adopt the crinoline, but continued to dress as she had done during her youth, in a skimpy, rather short black or dark silk dress, opened at the neck with a white

ruffle : and muslin caps—the *bonnet à la folle*—such as are worn by the heroines of Balzac's novels. Her unruly curls (always a source of anxiety) falling over her bright intelligent eyes, gave her face the tousled alertness of a Skye terrier. The charcoal self-portrait of her in her youth emphasises the delicate moulding of her mouth and all the fascinating irregularity of her features. It gives the impression of a *minois chiffonné*, without beauty, but of matchless charm.

Her salon now became the meeting-place of those who shared her prejudice against Napoleon III, but as the Mohls were both foreigners by birth, it was also considered neutral ground ; she was able to invite men and women belonging to all parties, unlike the Princess Lieven or the Comtesse de Boigne, whose receptions were limited to their own political coteries. Madame Mohl's was essentially a *salon d'esprit*. *

With the Second Empire, luxury, extravagance and ostentation, which Madame Mohl condemned, became the order of the day. Simplicity and refinement, grace and distinction, those carefully fostered flowers of French culture, seemed to have been uprooted from the soil of Paris. Yet her drawing-room, so shabby, so badly lit and old-fashioned, attracted the most celebrated men and women in

Europe. Newcomers who had had the good luck of obtaining the *entrée* to it must have been surprised, when they first called, to find tea and biscuits the only refreshment offered (in summer only *eau sucrée*). Madame Mohl asked her guests not to dress for her receptions and was quite vexed when Thackeray's daughters arrived wearing pretty light blue evening frocks.

A much more unpardonable offence, however, was to talk *tête-à-tête* in a corner, nor were the gentlemen ever allowed to form themselves into groups. One especially good conversationalist amongst them would be invited by the hostess to take his place at the chimney-corner (the acknowledged *tribune* in every salon) and it was his duty to open the game, throwing the gauntlet to an equally brilliant person. Then other hands would take it up, sometimes Madame Mohl herself, till the whole circle was drawn in. Her own powers of conversation were amazing. She seldom stopped to discriminate between sober sense or witty nonsense. Often she succeeded by some particularly outrageous statement in stimulating a silent member of the party. Chateaubriand said of her, "*qu'elle avait tant d'esprit qu'elle en donnait même aux plus bêtes.*" Those, however, who failed to shine or, worse, to listen, were not invited a second time.

One of her biographers compared her provocative sallies to the sharp stabs of a little silver pickaxe. She dug away with it to reveal the minds and uncover the ideas of those whose opinions she valued. "*Allons*," she would exclaim to him whom she had installed in the *tribune*, "*racontez-nous quelque-chose*," and obedient to her command, the man challenged gave the company of his best.

Madame Mohl had not the same *doux génie* which Sainte-Beuve ascribes to Madame Récamier, by which she bound together those holding widely different opinions. I doubt whether she would have wished to, in conversation anyway. On the contrary, she enjoyed watching the flints clash and the sparks fly. She tried, however, to restrain her own outbursts, realising through her salon-craft that by her supreme quality of listener rather than talker she could obtain the most brilliant effects. But at more intimate meetings she would let herself go—often, however, regretting the turbulence of her expression.

"One's opinions are the most troublesome snarling dogs I know. It's like having a pack of hounds in a handsome bedroom where one is visiting, and striving to keep them down, shutting doors and windows that they may not be heard, and now and then an awful bow-wow bursts out."

How grateful I am that there are many occasions on which she neglects to take these precautions in her letters : out they tumble, professions of faith, hope, and scant charity in an intemperate scramble of exuberance. All her correspondence during the Second Empire contains a bitter indictment of the reign of Napoleon III.

His mad excursions into foreign politics dismay her. She sees a menace to England, and warns her friends that " le Monsieur " is keeping Europe on fire. Are English statesmen blind, she asks, had they not taken his measure during the Crimean War ? None of your politicians escapes her flagellations—they are " a set of oofs and owls." Cobden was taken in by " our master the scamp " when he signed the commercial treaty with France in 1860, for Louis Napoleon was only trying to enter into closer relations with England in order to attack Prussia with impunity after he had piled up sufficient armaments for the purpose. Lord Palmerston is described as a *brouillon*, that " dear man Lord John " is being outwitted by " the rascalocracy " of France.

She complains that the taxation imposed on the French is colossal, an orgy of extravagance persists in all Government departments, the revenues of Paris have been mortgaged for years, and Hauss-

mann, willing tool of the Emperor, is pulling down half the city in order to fill his own pockets. In 1869 Julius Mohl describes the Government as "melting away like a statue of snow," and in 1870, as she had foreseen, the "Brummagem Boney" declared war on Prussia.

The Mohls spent that year in England. Although Julius had become a naturalised Frenchman in 1844, yet his position in France at such a time was a delicate one. The distinguished couple were made much of whilst in London, but both were filled with yearnings to return to their own home. Directly the siege was raised, Julius returned to the rue du Bac to make all ready for "Madamchen."

Then came the Commune. His letters to her, giving a terrible description of the madness of those months, are headed as from Charenton (the Bedlam of France), "*une fournaise de folie*" which he will not allow his wife to enter, a repetition on a smaller scale of the horrors of the Terror. The wanton destruction of life and property achieved more havoc than the war.

It was not till May 1871 that peace was restored : after three months of incessant thunder the guns were hushed, and the red light of incendiarism faded from the sky. Mary Mohl got home to a ravaged Paris early in June, to find all social life

dead as the fires which had levelled the Tuileries to the ground.

For the next year she is busy attempting to pick up the broken threads, rallying her friends around her, giving dinners of ten or twelve every fortnight, regarding these as the widow's mite she could contribute to the social renaissance. "Cultivating society being my especial talent, I will not bury it. I pay visits, I try to be as amiable as I can. I seldom say what I think" (we accept this statement with reserve), "as I believe that this is the great secret of the art of living."

After each dinner she had the habit of writing down notes regarding the conduct of her guests, for future reference: "Mr. X took no trouble to make himself agreeable"; "Madame Y was grumpy—shan't ask her again"; "La Comtesse de Z went away too soon, very rude"—and so on. She took her parties seriously, and was merciless to any of her friends who failed her, whatever the reason. "I was very sorry," she wrote to one who had disappointed her through illness, "but as I always consider a dinner party a morsel of art, I did not think of your misfortune in being ill, so much did I think of my own."

The only big entertainments at this time were given by the Duc d'Aumale, fourth son of Louis-

Philippe. She notes with satisfaction that the dresses worn at his soirées are pretty and far less exaggerated in fashion. She had never forgiven Eugénie for her crinolines !

Her own toilette had now to be considered, for her reflection in the mirror displeased her. " I am fearfully thin, I hope to be better next month. I own to my shame that my looks distress me beyond measure. It is very foolish, for old age must come." (She was seventy-nine !) She orders a new dress, not without apprehension. " It is an awful thing to cut up a handsome satin to make a gown that may not fit ; no dressmaker can fit me now my last one is dead, and I'm awfully particular." Mesdames, I amuse myself by wondering how the satin dress ordered for the Duc d'Aumale's party turned out. She was in the habit of wearing beautiful silks at night—grey, mauve, or black, and sometimes a rich bronze shade she called "*les cheveux de la reine.*" Amongst the four hundred guests assembled at the Duke's house I can imagine her light form moving nimbly through his crowded salons in her full satin skirts. The thousand candles of the crystal chandeliers wake the orient in their folds. Her thin hands, white as the lighted tapers above, are signalling and beckoning to the friends she has not seen for so many weary months. She is enraptured by the gay

scene, enchanted that she has brought her husband to it (he was reluctant to come), delighted with her good-looking host, pleased to see the eager welcome given to the Orléans family, “who have the best manners, the most distinguished airs; all those belonging to it are tall and handsome—in short, they look like princes.”

Paris is Paris again—at least to-night. There is light and talk and wit, and there are many hands to fill her goblet once more with the heady wine of youth. On returning to the rue du Bac she recognised that the portrait she had seen in the mirror was not a faithful one, the looking-glass above her *coiffeuse* had lied. It is not our faces but our souls that we see reflected. Tired but joyful, she laid the golden dress away in her dressing-room; the candles must be blown out too—but not yet . . . not yet. . . .

In 1874 Julius Mohl lost the last of his distinguished brothers—Robert, the political economist. He was himself unwell at the time, overwork and the stress of the war between his fatherland and his adopted country had undermined his constitution. She had found it difficult, even before this personal grief, to raise his spirits. She suspected herself of having lost the talisman which in time past had made every word she said, even her follies,

graceful in his eyes. She realised that there is a certain spring in the mind, a particular elasticity, which does not last for ever. She knew her husband was far from well, but he had sternly forbidden his doctors to inform her of the gravity of his condition. Indeed, he instructed them to make light of his symptoms. He grew worse very suddenly, and died on January 4th, 1875, stroking her face tenderly when he could no longer speak to her.

During the last day, when she saw he was leaving her, she summoned up courage to ask him what he wished her to do with his rare books, most precious possessions. It had taken him forty years to collect this remarkable library. She imagined it was his intention to bequeath it to his native city, Stuttgart. "No," he replied (*ami du vrai en toutes choses*), "sell them; that is the way to make books useful, they go to those who want them."

Although Madame Mohl lived six years longer, we may say that she did not survive him.

His death caused a profound sensation amongst all the men of learning in Europe. The Keeper of the Archives, Monsieur Maury, in his funeral oration described the great Orientalist as having become a sort of prism in which was reflected even the faintest ray of the brilliant light shed by the

East over the ancient history and geography of Asia. He was also the rainbow-focus of her being. In the first weeks of her sorrow she desired to "get rid of this tiresome combat we call life," but not before she had finished the work he had left behind him. Had she not done the same for Fauriel, dear departed shade, long years ago?—but then she had "her incomparable husband" to help her.

The idea of her alone in the apartment of the rue du Bac moves me poignantly. That aged, grief-stricken figure in the silent room which for forty years had been instinct with brilliant life. The chairs still ranged round the hearth as if, docile and expectant, they were awaiting those who day after day had occupied them. Shapeless, ugly, shabby chairs, no drawing-room had ever contained more of these, just as no salon had ever held a better company of men and women.

On the huge writing-table next door, where Julius Mohl had worked, stood his green-shaded lamp—unlit—symbolic of the illuminating rays of learning which death had now extinguished. His widow moved restlessly from one to the other, touching those silent witnesses with her hands, as if her soft caress might stir them into speech.

She had little heart to continue her pilgrimage, yet the *élan vital* was strong. Like a bracing wind it

quicken her—the will to live and to give, dispersed the clouds of despair. Words addressed to her after Fauriel's death came back. “*Voulez-vous savoir pourquoi vous ne serez pas complètement malheureuse ? C'est parce que si vous n'avez pas le pouvoir d'être consolée, vous avez toujours (et plus que bien d'autres) le don consolateur.*”

Julius Mohl's labour on the *Shānāmāh*, the great eleventh-century Persian epic, which the French Government had commissioned him to begin in 1825, was completed. A magnificent folio edition in six volumes had been printed in Persian characters (interleaved with his translation), at vast expense, by the Imprimerie Nationale; up to then it had existed in manuscript only, but the cost made it accessible to few. It had been his intention to publish it later in a less expensive format, with various additional new *éclaircissements*. He was engaged on this work when he died. Mary Mohl set herself courageously to the interrupted task, and in less than two years she had realised his ambition.

She also collected and published, later, two volumes of notes from lectures and addresses to the Asiatic Society, of which he had been Secretary, under the title of *Vingt-sept ans d'histoire des études orientales*.

She hoped that the second volume of this book,

as it is largely concerned with India and the research devoted to her ancient civilisations, would be of special interest in England: but she adds petulantly, "the majority of English people regard Asia from the political view-point only, and India merely as a favourable marriage-market for their daughters. They are devoid of the deep veneration shown by Germany and France for the cradle of all metaphysical thought."

Culture with her was a religion. "Nothing," she explained in a letter, "is more mysterious than the growth of civilisation; it is as impossible to see its progress as to trace that of an oak working itself on during the centuries. Each generation will pause to measure its growth, and in the same manner we compute the slow but sure expansion of the mind of man."

Madame Mohl was eighty-seven when she placed into hands which reached out eagerly to grasp them those precious heirlooms of her husband's learning. Thus spirits finely touched receive their rich reward.

Little by little she began to go amongst her friends again, for she was never able to stint them of her presence. Her intense desire to please ("*au fond il n'y a que cela*") did not forsake her.

Neither letter-writing, reading, nor travel ap-

peared to cost her more effort than in former years. After she had added these laurels to her scholar's wreath we hear of her reading the third volume of Kinglake's *Invasion of the Crimea* (without her spectacles) and describing it as "one of the events of my life." Her annual visit to England was undertaken alone, without a maid or a tremor. On one of these journeyings she lost her trunk, but when friends sympathised with her, she exclaimed, "Ah, my dear, I should not care at all, if only my hair would curl."

Nevertheless she compared herself to "an old dried leaf blown about by the wind. I fall into a corner till a gust comes, and all at once I am in the whirlwind." Perhaps she was picturing a leaf which December has tarnished deep brown with golden streaks—the colour of the dress she had worn the night of the Duc d'Aumale's party—but we shall think of her eternally as a green one dancing in June sunshine.

But the dread of failing powers haunted her. "I feel the decadence in my mind as plainly as in my body. To turn two or three facts into an idea is so easily done if the faithful servant memory is at hand to bring the ideas together and put them into cages," but *that* invaluable one had deserted her. Other willing slaves there were, anxious to wait on

her. Monsieur St. Hilaire (her executor) abandoning his studies on Aristotle, gave a great deal of his valuable time to her affairs, and dined with her once a week. Madame d'Abbadie, who lived in the ground-floor apartment, visited her every evening, to chat with her till, at nine-thirty, she nodded off to sleep. Her doctor, whom she loved, came in and out.

On the last day of her life St. Hilaire had supper with her, a tête-à-tête supper with the dining-table drawn close to the hearth. Her mind, sharp-cut and crystal clear, showed no symptoms of the mental fatigue of which she complained. In their talk that evening they wandered, rejoicing, through the sunlit landscapes of the Past. She curled herself up on the big sofa, which now stood in the centre of the room. When the tray was brought in, he was surprised to hear her depute him to make tea. Never before had she allowed anyone to perform this sacred rite. He refused, laughing, to accept such a responsibility, agreeing only to pour in the water.

It was close on midnight before he left her; before she would let him go. Then they said *au revoir*—this time it was good-bye.

A few hours later she had a severe fainting attack. Her servants, alarmed, sent for those near and dear

to her. Mr. McKay, the chaplain of the English church, was called. At first she objected to receiving him as she was unable to rise, but finally consented, remarking, "Above all, my dear, I wish to be civil to him."

The watchers by her bed never left her on that early summer morning. The voice of Paris could not reach her here. Perhaps she would have liked to listen to the familiar clatter of the rue du Bac, the crack of the coachmen's whips, the clamour of wheels on the *pavé* of her street, the cries of the hawkers who thronged it ; but a great hush lay around her. The fire on the hearth burned low, from time to time a jet of flame leapt from the smouldering logs. So it was with her indomitable spirit, the bright flash of her wit revived. When her Persian cat jumped on her bed—a descendant of Pussy the Great whose dynasty had been long established in the Mohl household—she fondled him, her frail hands losing themselves in the white abundance of his fur. "*Il est si distingué,*" she murmured, "*sa femme ne l'est pas du tout, mais il ne s'en aperçoit pas, il est comme beaucoup d'hommes en cela.*" The quizzing smile parted her lips with the irresistible impulse to tease.

Madame Quinet, her niece, Mademoiselle de Tourguénieff, Madame d'Abbadie, knelt round her

bed. She asked pardon of them and of her maids for any act of unkindness on her part. Those who were keeping vigil heard her bless them : then peace took possession of her, and her breathing ceased.

Any of the people gathered here to-day might have had the privilege of Madame Mohl's acquaintance, for it is less than twenty years since she died, in her ninetieth year, but she seems to belong to a much more distant past. Personally I prefer to make my own imaginary portrait of her, though it cannot be perfect as it is not painted from life. I could only have seen her as an old woman, huddled by her fireside, listening for the steps of those long dead, whose footfall she would not hear again, though their echo rings in the corridors of fame. I would have wished to see her in her prime, drawing from life a satisfaction far more complete than any we derive, or in her youth when, rapturous and reckless, she laid siege to the hearts of men, and they had no choice but to surrender. I want *my* portrait to represent her thus.

If some necromancer could make my picture speak, I would summon up courage to ask her if she knew me—one of her many humble worshippers, and I hope her answer would be the one she gave when, dying, she was asked if she recognised

Mrs. Wynne Finch, "*Pardi, si je la connais !*" And so, Messieurs, Mesdames, if one day a learned person enquires of you whether you know anything about Madame Mohl, her friends, and her times, this little hour will not have been wasted if you too can meet that challenge with those words.

Before the lecturer got down from her dais the audience had begun to leave the room. Rather discouraging, this unseemly haste, Marion reflected, as she watched them squeezing past each other like sheep scrambling through the gap in a hedge. She hoped to overhear some comments on the lecture, but one and all were pressing to reach the tea-tables. She waited for Madame Grandchose to collect her notes, and to descend ponderously from the platform ; then she conducted her into the dining-room and left her with Father Keogh, who expressed his appreciation of her performance in the facile French he had acquired at Saint-Sulpice seminary. The two Miss Bates, anchored in her immediate neighbourhood, were awaiting an opportunity to demonstrate theirs.

The surging round the buffet gratified Sellars ; he wore a noble mien entrenched behind it, confronting the urn. The footmen circulated perilously in the

throng, bearing cups and glasses on slippery silver salvers. All the still-room maid's masterpieces were disappearing like snow in summer.

The Duchess of St. Ives expressed a wish to be introduced to the lecturer. As Marion forced her way through the room she became aware that only local gossip was being discussed here. Courteously attentive as the listeners had been, they were now like dogs who, after a swim, shake themselves heartily on the river bank. The immersion of the Berkshire neighbours into the waters of a *salon d'esprit* had been chilling and surprising, they were determined nothing of it should remain with them. The Duchess, a cargo steamer towed by a tug, followed her hostess slowly, stopping at every moment to shake hands. It was no easy matter to bring her and the Frenchwoman together, everyone was anxious to have a few words with her Grace. But when contact was finally established her affability to the *conférencière* was all that Marion could wish.

"I enjoyed your address—most original and clever. I shall certainly try to come to the next one, and bring my two daughters. I did not quite like to do so this time. One is always a little nervous about anything in French. My husband said to me, 'You'd better not take the girls—it's sure to be

spicy.' But there was not a word to-day that Isabel and Adelaide could not have heard. One has to be careful in these days of unbridled speech. Even the conversation at my own dining-table is often not fit for their ears. I am always having to remind my friends that young people are present. '*Pas devong les jeung filles.*' I say, or '*Pas devong les domestiques.*'

"And then fiction—and the theatre ! I actually caught Isabel reading that dreadful book of Thomas Hardy's, *Jude the Obscure*, and Adelaide was invited to go to *The Gay Lord Quex*—a most pernicious play. I can't think why the Lord Chamberlain did not censor it. Our drama is being much influenced by the French playwrights, one deplores that, though of course they are very clever . . . but one doesn't want that sort of thing *here*—it's harmful. That's why I agreed with the Duke that it would be wiser for me to come alone. What is the subject of your next talk ? Madame Récamier ?—charming, quite delightful. Perhaps we can arrange for you to give a lecture at St. Ives early in the autumn ? Back in Paris again ? I'm very fond of Paris, I often stay there for a night when I'm on my way to the Riviera. We stay at the Mirabeau, in the Roo de la Paix, do you know it ? (Mirabeau is a kind of plum, isn't it ? *Compote* of *Mirabeaux* I seem to remember the chef

writing on the menu-slate.) It's convenient for the Louvre. I like shopping at the Louvre. My husband's father was Honorary Attaché when Lord Granville was our Ambassador in Paris. . . . I expect Madame Mohl knew the Granvilles. She must have had the entrée into diplomatic circles. A most remarkable woman—so adaptable. I think we English *are* very adaptable, don't you ? ”

Marion left them to go and press some sandwiches on Mrs. Piercey. The Bates sisters fell on her, they had been over-stimulated by the lecture. The Vicar, standing close to his wife, had seized this opportunity to air his political views to those whose heads were in the manger. His denunciations made the welkin ring, but the fact that the iced coffee had run out aroused more general indignation. Marion was attending to the shortage when Luke Vaughan came up to her.

“The lecture was excellent,” he said quietly. “I enjoyed it, and I've lost my heart to Mary Mohl. I wonder what she would have thought of a Berkshire salon in this year of grace.”

“I'm sure she wouldn't have been such a fool as to attempt an afternoon of this kind.”

“Why, don't you think it's been a success ? ”

“The tea has, there's not a strawberry left.”

“I suppose the locusts would have eaten the

leaves off the Duchess' coronet if she'd been wearing it."

"Do come and talk to Madame Grandchose, I think she's having rather a dreary time."

Marion took him up to her.

"So I did not bore you too much, Monsieur," the old Frenchwoman said, adjusting her toque, and giving a flick to her coiffure. "I'm afraid the English are intolerant of lectures. Unlike the Americans, they dislike being forcibly fed on what the Germans call *Kultur*. I don't blame them. A *conférence* is not very nourishing, but like an hors d'œuvre it sometimes excites the appetite. Are you interested in the period I covered? One likes to plunge into that ocean of memoirs with which it abounds. There are so many pearls to be found. . . . The men and women who wrote them were built on a grand scale, I feel very small myself when I have been in their society. It would be nice to grow big or small *à volonté* like your Alice in Wonderland. This delicious pastry which you are offering me will not, alas, add one cubit to my mental stature, but it will have an undesirable effect on my silhouette. No matter! I can't resist." She wolfed the éclair he handed to her, and topped it with a caramel-covered bun. Across her broad white face her eyes appeared to be drawn in

charcoal, black and hard, but her voice was silky and caressing. Luke Vaughan was fascinated by its modulations.

The room was emptying fast. A steady stream of departing carriages was flowing past the windows. The Vicar's pony-cart, driven by Mrs. Piercey, jogged slowly by. He stopped, gallantly, to offer a lift to Mrs. Ames and Miss Porter, but they declined it. Their parasols, like two animated mushrooms, could be seen bobbing across the buttercup-spangled park.

"Have I time to make a little tour of the garden before I leave for the station?" Madame Grandchose enquired of Marion.

"Plenty of time, if you are not too tired."

Luke abandoned his intention of cranking up his car. He had left it at a respectful distance from the place where the horses had been drawn up. It was standing half-way up the back drive, stinking horribly and exuding black oil on the carefully raked gravel.

"May I come too?" he asked.

The three walked out into the still evening air. The sky was growing rosy, and the first of the homeward-bound rooks was planing downwards towards the hanging woods below the stables. Thrushes and blackbirds on the lawn, grown bold

L A T E S U M M E R

in the fading light, had come close to the house to indulge in their last rapturous song.

“This place is Paradise,” said Madame Grandchose, knitting her dusky eyebrows, “a terrestrial Paradise. I envy it.”

“Do you ?” said Marion.

VI

MARION's father was going with the bailiff of the Home Farm to look at some stock. She saw him drive off in the double dogcart with Baxter beside him. On the back seat Joe, the tiger, was perched, with arms crossed over his brass-buttoned breast. It was good to see Sir Thomas handle the greys, and touch the bouncing quarters of the pair with the pipe-clayed lash of his holly whip. Would Luke Vaughan inspire her with equal confidence presently when he crouched over the driving wheel of that hideous monster, the De Dion-Bouton? Why did motor-cars come from France, she wondered. The French love the elegance of carriages and horses ; she had not forgotten the beauty of the ones she had seen as a child, bowling up the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

And now there was the difficulty of her clothes. What does one wear in a motor-car ? Mrs. Tryon had been enveloped in a long grey alpaca ulster buttoned from chin to ankle, like a kennelman's coat ; over her hat she had tied a thick gauze veil, and she was further protected by a vizor—goggles

edged with plush where they straddled across the nose. Marion had none of these things. She rang for Newman and consulted her.

"Is it *safe* for you to go out in a motor-car? Does Sir Thomas know? Don't you think I ought to go with you?"

"Don't be silly, Newman. Tell me what I am to put on."

"How would your fawn crêpe frock do? You could wear the ostrich-feather boa with that, and a lace veil over your picture hat."

"Would I be warm enough?"

"Warm? Mr. Sellars says it's the hottest day we have had."

"Yes, but we shall be flying through the air, and Mrs. Tryon tells me it's often very cold. We may be travelling twenty miles an hour!"

"Then why not put on your white serge coat and skirt, with your Irish crochet blouse?"

"My beige would show the dust less—it's chilly and dusty, motoring."

"Then take a carriage rug with you, I'll tell Mr. Sellars to get one out of the chest in the hall. They're in moth-ball, but the smell will soon go off."

She was waiting under the shade of the tulip tree on the lawn when she heard the distant

snortings of the approaching machine. It was a little time, however, before it came in sight.

Luke drew up before the portico with an eldritch screech from his brakes. "What fun!" she called out to him. His face was covered with a fine coating of white dust, it clung thick to his eyebrows and eyelashes. His head, neck and shoulders looked as if he had been dipped in flour.

"The car is running grandly." He patted its side encouragingly as he got out. "Are you going to sit beside me, or in the back?—there's less wind there, but it's not so comfortable."

"In front, of course, then we shall be able to talk, or will you be too busy driving?"

"I'm afraid Mademoiselle de Dion-Bouton prefers her own voice to be heard, she is so noisy that it's difficult to keep up a sustained conversation. Actually it's more comfortable to have the wind blow straight in one's face sitting in front, than to have it buffet one sideways, when one is sitting behind, and one gets the dust everywhere."

"So I see." She was winding her Limerick lace scarf across the brim of her hat, flattening the crown.

"I ought to have been wearing a winged cap like Mercury, another pair of wings on my heels

and a couple of serpents twisted round my parasol. Does it really feel like flying ? ”

“ Come and try. I’m sorry you’ve no goggles. You’d better wear my sister’s. One gets things of all sorts into one’s eyes.”

“ No, really, I shall see better without them. It must be lovely watching the landscape as one flashes by. The seat is so nice and high, I shall be able to look over all the hedgerows.”

Sellars was in a tremor when Vaughan produced the starting-handle and prepared to crank up.

“ Can I do that for you, sir ? ”

Three abortive efforts had made Vaughan hot and breathless.

“ You shan’t try. I saw a man’s arm broken that way.”

“ As dangerous as that, sir ? ”

Vaughan did not reply—he was desperate : time after time he had swung ineffectually. Marion felt discouraged.

“ You don’t mean to say that the thing’s not going to *start* ? ”

Some minor adjustments were attempted with the bonnet lifted, then he returned to the task. There was a sudden splutter succeeded by a roar, a violent quiver shook the motor-wagonette from stem to stern. Marion, perched beside the driver’s

seat, vibrated with it. "That's done it—are you all right?" He got in beside her. Sellars retreated nervously to the front-door steps. Yes, Marion was all right, as all right as anybody can be seated on a miniature earthquake.

"We shall be home for tea," Marion called out superbly. "Tell Sir Thomas when he comes in."

"Where shall we drive to?" Luke asked. "I vote we stick to the lanes, it's not fair to horses to go more than one can help on the main roads."

As soon as they began to travel down the drive she was in an ecstasy. A startled group of deer left the shadow of a grove of trees to gallop across the sunlit open. Marion felt endowed with their speed, and more, but she wished there were less vibration; she felt she was unbecomingly palsied, "shaking like an aspic," as Newman would have said. But the driver's eyes were riveted on road and wheel.

"Let's go through our woods then. Drive through Foxley village and turn to the right at the Verlander Arms, then left by the church."

They were going downhill and gathering pace alarmingly. Her eyes were brimming with tears, and the fur rug, wrapped around her knees tenderly by Sellars, was ballooning out in all directions. Impossible to hold it down. One of the ends of her

scarf had become unfastened, and was streaming behind her like an oriflamme. She felt as virile as Joan of Arc, but she should, like the Maid of Orleans, have worn male costume for this adventure. She gave a sigh of relief (though, of course, it had been lovely—too lovely) when he pulled up with a jerk in a mossy ride of the beech woods. “We’ll stop here and get out to look at the bluebells—oh, are they nearly over? What a shame! Never mind, it’s awfully jolly here, and the car seemed to be getting very hot.” He helped her down from the high seat. “And how do you like motoring?”

“I adore it, it’s like flying—something that up till now only the birds have enjoyed—I suppose it will be possible to talk in them some day, when they’ve been perfected.”

The silence of the wood after the ear-splitting roar of the engine was grateful and comforting.

“Don’t you think lots of people will buy them soon? I suppose everyone who can afford to will, but they’re frightfully expensive, aren’t they, hundreds of pounds.” But she was thinking sadly of her father’s prejudices. How ruthlessly he dealt with the motoring offences which came before him on the bench.

“Of course they must never become *really* silent—just think how dangerous that would be

to anything on the roads." She was a little giddy when she first alighted and the world stood still after rushing past her at such a dizzying pace. Her legs felt weak and shaky. Lines from Tennyson's "Maud" flashed into her mind :

*" O let the solid ground
Not fail beneath my feet,"*

and as she trod the crisp, curled beech leaves she finished the stanza :

*" Before my life has found
What some have found so sweet."*

Marion was right about the bluebells. They had faded, but drifts of them remained, limp and pallid, and their scent was strong and sickly. An occasional ivory star marked the clumps where primroses had clustered under hazels, their pink hairy stalks bending under the summer heat.

They walked a little distance into the wood. It was teeming with life. Cock pheasants gave startled croaks as they broke clumsily from the undergrowth, wood-pigeons left their perches on the high boughs with an explosive clap of wings, a red squirrel described a sudden spiral round the bole of a tree and vanished into space.

" Here's a nice stump, let's sit down on it a

moment," Luke suggested. "We are creating such a panic here."

The minute they were seated Marion felt she had nothing to say. But he did not seem to want to speak, and she soon lost any sense of shyness at their silence. He lit a match for his cigarette and dropped it on the carpet of twigs and leaves; he was watching the insect world at his feet. "It's like dropping a bomb in Threadneedle Street—look at the black-coated City workers all scuttling away."

"Take care of the dog-violets, they don't like being roasted alive, and if so many leaves are burnt, there won't be enough to cover up the babes in the wood when winter comes."

The little "smudge" burnt sharply till he stamped it out.

"It doesn't look as if it ever could. How extraordinary that landscape is capable of such transformations. Don't you sometimes wish people were too? Wouldn't it be fun if they had their winters and summers?"

"Don't they?"

"Oh, I don't mean the seven ages of man. But if one could say 'he was not at his best then, it was his December,' or 'she is always so wonderful in her June.'"

"I believe summer does change one. The sap rises, something freshens and greens."

"To die again?"

"Yes, probably. That's the trouble. Those moods don't add another shoot which will ripen for the future, they're just an animal reaction to warmth and well-being. But these branches"—he bent a nut-bough towards him—"are making something for next year. I haven't made any 'new wood,' as the gardeners say, for ages—not since I was in my teens."

"What sort of childhood did you have?" she asked.

"Hellish. I was an awfully dreary, lonely boy. My father died when I was sixteen, and my mother dragged me all over the Continent for further education—Geneva, Heidelberg, Paris. Then I crammed for Woolwich."

"And after that?"

"After that soldiering—Aldershot, Egypt, India, and then Camberley. I've never been in any place long enough to strike roots. That's no life."

"I've been here always. We never leave Foxley, any of us, we're part of it. We can't, it's got us by the throat."

"But do you want to?"

"Sometimes. Those are my Decembers, when I

get all frozen up, and nothing stirs in me. Shall we walk to the end of the wood? My father's paddocks are on the other side. You might like to have a look at the yearlings."

They were ankle-deep in dead leaves above which wild orchids reared their spotted foliage. A high barbed-wire fence faced them at the boundary.

"Bother, we've missed the gate; the trees are so thick just here, we must scramble through. We have to wire the plantations on account of the deer—they get out of the Park sometimes and damage the young trees."

"Won't you tear your dress?"

He took off his coat and laid it across the lower strand, holding up the one above it. "Now if you can squeeze between . . ." She did so, gathering her long skirts together.

They found themselves in blinding sunshine. It hit them between the eyes like the blow of a fist after the deep shade of the covert. All around them the emerald pastures were gilded with buttercups. Three yearlings raised their fawn-like heads to stare at them.

"The chestnut is by Galopin out of a mare of my father's which ran fourth in the Oaks. The bay with a white blaze is by the same sire and a more obscure dam. That grey filly is the one I like best,

but Father says she's too high on the leg. I can't see that; they all have that ridiculous look of being on stilts. It gives them the innocence of Italian primitives. What a lot is expected of them, poor babies!" She looked fondly at the foals moving discreetly away from the intruders. "Such high hopes are centred on them, I wonder if a sense of responsibility burdens them . . . like clever University boys who are expected to take a Double First."

Luke was watching the sky.

"Do you think there's going to be a storm? If so, I think we should turn back. Anyway, you said you would be home for tea."

They found the gate which they had missed before, and the path, cushioned with moss, which led them back to where they had left the car.

"You haven't told me anything about your own life, except that it was all spent here—in these Elysian fields."

"There's so little to tell." She felt a glow of satisfaction at the question, few people had ever expressed curiosity about her. "It's been made up of such small things—working at the unimportant in a schoolroom with 'Bonne,' my French governess, when I was little, doing a mass of insignificant things, after I grew up, for my father. A piling of spillikins. There seems just nothing to

tell, each year is cut out on the pattern of the one before."

"But if one of the spillikins were withdrawn the whole lot would crash. I expect it all rests on you, it's your skill which holds the structure together."

She would have liked to go on talking, but they had reached the car. This time there was no difficulty in starting, it responded amiably to the first turn of the handle. They chugged along triumphantly under the overhanging branches. There were some heavy clouds on the horizon and some layers of thin white gossamer across the blue.

"Do you know what 'Bonne' called those streaky ones—'*fil de la Vierge*.'"

"Are you a Catholic?"

"Yes, my mother was Irish."

The drive back to the village took no time at all. It was opposite the inn that the motor stopped with a hiccough and two violent back-fires.

"Hullo, what's that?"

What was it, indeed? Luke wondered too. One thing only was certain—the motor refused to advance another yard. None of the previous cajoling could elicit a spark of life from the dead engine.

"I'm frightfully sorry, we'll have to leave it here, that's plain, and get home some other way ;

not very dignified—do you think we can hire a shay ? ”

“ They’ve got a fly here, I only hope it’s not out.”

The village street was agog. Men, women and children appeared like the harvest of the dragon’s teeth and crowded round the car, joking together.

“ Which is its business end . . . we don’t want it to savage us, Miss Marion ? ” the ostler asked.

“ Do get the cab out quickly, Blackett. Sir Thomas will be worried if we are late.”

“ Keep them lads off,” an old greybeard adjured them, “ they’ll do it a mischief,” and he began laying about him with his stick ; “ they’ve never been up to a motor-car before, the young varminths.”

The cab was soon forthcoming ; the motorists got in shamefacedly.

“ Right away ! ” Someone slammed the crazy door.

Pill-box of a cab—she felt comfortable and safe inside it. A sudden sense of intimacy with her companion made her glad of the breakdown. Was it her fancy that he too was enjoying it ? They were in a little house of their own now—a house on wheels, and both were well content. She liked his indolent pose, the long legs crossed and shoulders thrown back against the moth-punctured cushions, and she

liked his cheerful acceptance of their undignified situation. She watched the familiar landmarks on the way home, and wished the journey might last for ever—to the edge of the world and beyond. But in fifteen minutes they could already see the house, with Sellars standing in the forecourt. Tansy and Newman were on the front-door steps.

"We heard you'd had an accident," Sellars said as he wrenched at the door-handle.

"Scarcely that, but we've left the car at the Verlander Arms. Perhaps it stopped there for a pint. . . ."

Marion was relieved to find that her father had not returned. She gave Luke tea in the library.

"We'll arrange to get you home to-morrow somehow, but of course you will have to stay here to-night."

"I think in that case I'll send a telegram to my sister. People haven't accustomed themselves yet to the chances and changes of our motor life."

"The fly can take it down to the village; one can send a wire up to seven o'clock."

He went out into the hall to write one and give it to the driver.

After they had finished tea Vaughan wandered round the room looking at the book-shelves. The sun shone on the soft mouse-coloured spines and

burnished the toolings with an added dose of gold. He drew out one or two volumes with the tender hands of a book-lover. She showed him some of their treasures. At every moment she expected to hear the wheels of her father's carriage, but she would not allow the prospect of interruption to throw a shadow on her pleasure.

"You have some nice pictures, will you show them to me? I remember them vaguely from the last time I was here—I should like to see them again."

"We shan't have a very good light, but quite as good as they deserve. We haven't got anything valuable—just the usual country-house pictures with high-sounding attributions. If one believed the catalogue they would be worth millions. Most of them are in the long gallery which runs the whole length of the house. I expect it is where my ancestresses took their exercise in bad weather."

He followed her upstairs ; she handed him the catalogue with a smile.

The seven thick-sashed windows faced south, but the sun had gone into the west. After the warmth of the library this room felt dead and chill. She paused on the threshold to give him time to admire its magnificent proportions.

“The gallery is rather grim, really—I used to be terrified of it as a child. Pictures are ghostly things anyway, like materialised spirits. When they are not portraits they’re the perpetuation of a passing mood, aren’t they? They haven’t the same living breath as books. There are all kinds here, as you see, landscapes, still-lives, portraits—a hotch-potch, but Father will not allow them to be re-hung or have the bad ones weeded out. Nobody loves them, and they know it, one can see that in their faces. Shall I tell you what I know about them, or would you like to look at the list as you go round?” They compromised. Now and again she called on him to admire what pleased her. “There are such lots,” she sighed, “one can’t be intimate with such a crowd. Sometimes I feel that the story of a life is here. . . . This is her at a very early age.”

“Who?”

“The subject of my story—she hasn’t got a name—this little round-faced heavy-eyed child aged five (it’s called a Holbein, but let that pass). Here she is older, marriageable—of course it’s not the same person really, I am just making up a tale—and she is affianced to the charming boy in the blue suit with the point-lace collar. I like that picture better than any in the room, I believe it really *is* a Vandyke. They would have been happy as birds if the

baleful woman opposite them in that exaggerated *décolleté* had not determined to wreck the marriage. She waited till after the wedding and then, when they were wandering blissfully in this landscape—(she pointed to a spurious Poussin of umber trees, indigo lake, and heavy storm-grey sky)—then she manoeuvred to throw this dark-eyed fellow, who hangs pendant to her, across her path. Look at their *Fête Champêtre*.” Luke Vaughan stood before a little French picture. “It was during this picnic that he enslaved the bride’s affections. Here is the bouquet he sent her next day (it’s called ‘Flower Piece by Campidoglio’). When she received those striped tulips, that cabbage rose and those stiff carnations, it was all up with her, poor girl. I think this must be a picture of the mountain pass by which the guilty couple escaped when he led her to his fastness.”

“And her lawful husband—what happened to him in your story?” Luke asked.

“Oh, he died young, as you see by the dates on the frame—which was tactful of him. He has an air of extraordinary melancholy.”

“I can’t think of pictures in that way,” Luke said. “I am far too matter-of-fact. I might weave a romance about one, but I can’t do all this juggling with different periods and schools. You are un-

worthy of such a charming collection if you make such fun of it."

"Well, then, I'll leave you alone with it and go and order your room to be prepared. When you're tired of the pictures come down to the library."

It was true what she had said, this was an uneasy room. Many watchful eyes were resting on him—disapproving eyes, he fancied—and when he was by himself they seemed to grow more inimical.

He stayed in the gallery till he heard Marion's voice again on the stairs, greeting her father. "How *did* you hear about our troubles?" she was asking. Then she called to him, "Captain Vaughan, my father has returned."

Sir Thomas explained—"One of the under gardeners rode up to the stables on his bicycle and told Reuben to go to fetch you in the pony-cart."

"If we'd got the telephone everything would be so much simpler."

"My dear Marion, telephones in the country! Why, that will never be possible, thank God."

"I ought to be getting home, Sir Thomas," Luke said. "I expect there's a train I could catch."

"The last one for Brackenham left ten minutes ago." Sellars was consulting his watch.

"No, you must spend the night here, my boy,

as Marion suggests, and we'll get you home somehow in the morning."

So Luke Vaughan, clad in Sir Thomas' long nightshirt, slept in the *ponceau* room. Before turning in he drew aside the damask curtains, of the colour which gave the bedroom its name. A full moon made the landscape bright as day. Owls were hooting dolorously. He wondered if the white night was favourable to their nocturnal hunting. He thought of the South African moon as he had seen it looking down on the camp-fires round which he had spent so many evenings, warming his puttees, talking of England. There were other fires out yonder. The burning homesteads, the flaming hearts of the Boers. Men were fighting for their land—inch by inch. Sir Thomas Verlander and Marion would do the same for theirs.

He blew out the candles after he had climbed into the four-poster. It was good to be out of hospital, good to be home, good to be here.

VII

FOR the past few days everyone at and around Foxley had been saying, "I do hope we shall have it fine for Ascot," but it seemed unlikely. The flawless weather of early June had broken. Gusts of shrewish wind and thin showers of cold rain had scattered the ruby husks of the young lime buds far and wide across the lawns, and the blossoms of azalea, broken from their fragile calices, lay dashed on the rain-sodden beds. No rosebud dared venture to unfold itself.

Marion's thoughts turned sorrowfully to her light-coloured dresses and shady hats. But it was always like this—she had known so many Ascots come and go, that the uncertainty about the weather weighed less than the conviction of the ennui which this week ensured. Yet she knew how keenly her father was looking forward to it; he counted the days to the arrival of his guests. Each year brought the same; they needed no invitation, merely a reminder from Marion of the train by which they were expected to leave Paddington.

Uncle Bernard and Aunt Kitty—they would have been more welcome if they still brought chocolates for her as they used to do in long-ago days ; Colonel Anstruther, who now came accompanied by one of his pasty-faced daughters ; Lord Kilmayne, her godfather, who had joined the 17th Lancers the same year as her father. He relied always on finding his old flame, Mrs. Murphy, at Foxley ; it would have been unthinkable to disappoint him. There were two or three rooms which Sir Thomas left Marion to fill, but lately she had been too indifferent to find occupants for these. This summer she made the excuse that all the men she knew were at the Front, and her cousin Moira, who usually came over from Ireland for the meeting, had gone out to South Africa with a V.A.D. detachment.

The memories which Ascot left behind it, of clothes ill-suited to the temperature, of lost gloves and parasols, of tight shoes and great weariness, became startlingly vivid as the date approached. The end of each day stood out clear.

“ We’ll all meet here directly after the last race but one. Here—under the clock,” the ukase went forth. But when she reached the rendezvous it would be only her father who had kept it. “ I can’t think what’s happened to the others,” he would

say irritably. "Where the devil is my sister, and that young man from the Foreign Office whom you imported—what's his name? What on earth has happened to him? There's Anstruther—he doesn't see us—blind as a bat, he always was; ah, now he does! Well, he'd better get off with you and Bernard in the brake and anyone else who turns up. Kitty and Kathleen Murphy can drive in the brougham, and I'll take Kilmayne in the phaeton. I expect he backed the winner in the last race. What price was he, Charlie, old boy? It was a good thing, that horse is bred to be a stayer." A stayer—that was just what Marion was not. She had no stamina for racing.

There were occasions when Aunt Kitty insisted on watching the royal party drive away. Mrs. Chatfield's eyes would dim with loyal emotion as she observed the aigrettes in the Princess of Wales' toque and the orchids in her gown, inclining with her gracious bows and the swaying of the Cee springs. The Prince of Wales' white hat, raised again and again in debonair salute, followed the same gracious rhythm. How Marion envied their leisured progress down the emerald sward on their homeward journey! Hers, along the dusty roads, boxed in the brougham or perched on the brake, was a less pleasant one. Still, Ascot is Ascot,

and when the fourth day came she was lost in gratitude that there was not a fifth.

After the party got back to the house the *via dolorosa* of the long evening stretched before her—less formidable now that people played bridge—the new game which no one understood fully but which kept them happy, though a certain amount of acrimonious dispute accompanied it : constant reminders to the dealer not to turn up the last card, and to his partner to lay down his hand, appeared to be necessary.

Marion's father did not play. There would be racing shop talked between him and his old brother officer ; the ties of blood-stock bound them close together. " So-and-so's got a good nick this time. Did you see how strong his colt finished ? But they must not hurry him—he'll make a Cup-horse some day." And Marion must not hurry her father, for every minute of this week was rapture to him. She reproved herself for her selfish impatience.

Many times, poor darling, he endured the bitterness of seeing one of his own horses disappoint him, but he bore failure with Christian fortitude. When he had a runner Marion studied his tense face while he stood watching the horse being saddled. With a little knot of idle spectators she stood on the threshold of the box. A hushed silence

fell on the group when the saddle, no bigger than a cabbage-leaf, was placed in position, and a hind-leg struck out playfully, scattering the tan, as the girths were pulled up by the trainer. Soothing words were spoken by the travelling lad as a libation of water out of a beer-bottle was poured into the violently protesting mouth, and a snowy rubber afterwards wiped the drops away from the twitching lips and nostrils. Then the onlookers outside gave way and the horse was led out into the paddock. Sir Thomas and the trainer followed him out of the cool darkness of the box into the mild air and brightness. In rapt partnership the two conversed with feigned nonchalance, standing in the centre of that wheel of slow-revolving horses. How lovely their turning movements, and the cat-like grace of each stride : lovely, too, the patchwork of colour made by the cluster of the satin-clad pigmies. She liked to see the trainer fling his jockey, light as a flower-petal, into the saddle. Immediately after this her father would hurry off to the Iron Stand, frowning and intent, without so much as a glance thrown in her direction. She would not see him again till the race was over. . . . Then she would try to find words, specious ones, with which to console him. She wanted to comfort him as a nurse comforts a child for a broken toy—a prettier, better, unbreakable

one would be found for him. Needless to search for consoling sentences—the horse had run remarkably well, he told her, there were excellent reasons to account for his failure; trainer and jockey had explained them already. He had not jumped off as well as he might have done when the starter dropped the flag. “Was he green?” Marion asked (perhaps, she reflected, only her father was that), “or short of a gallop?” Perish the thought! With that fatal inheritance of round joints, more work, when the going was so hard, would have been fatal—broken him down for sure. The horse had been running gamely till the jockey had been obliged to give that five-year-old from the Duke of Portland’s stable the rails. Everyone had acted for the best, everyone was exonerated—next time out all would be different.

Racing, she decided, is a microcosm of life with its pathetic optimism of the future. Those who take their pleasure in it are prisoners of hope.

Only once, she remembered, her father’s jockey had given the real reason for inglorious defeat. “The horse isn’t a racehorse, Sir Thomas, and that’s Gawd’s truth.” But little Danny Maher’s sincerity had made things no easier.

This year, much to Marion’s relief, nothing in

her father's stable had been entered at Ascot. The Verlander colours were seldom successful here. She would be spared the enquiries of those who, eager for information, approached her at such times. People whose acquaintance with her began and ended with a tepid handshake greeted her at such times with embarrassing effusion: "Does Sir Thomas fancy his?" She would be immune from them; she could watch this restless tide of coloured gowns and black coats with detachment. Who were they, all these? Their names should be written on their foreheads as in the Book of Revelation, it would be far easier than struggling to decipher them on their Enclosure Badges, which Marion attempted to do. "I haven't seen you for ages," that was the formula they adopted.

But this day seemed an age in itself—an aeon. It was an unending game of hide-and-seek that everybody was playing. If you do not move you are lost, equally you are lost if you do. It's perpetual motion; it's the treadmill. You must keep on looking for someone while somebody is looking for you. Only Time stands still, and the bookmakers.

On a seat immediately behind her sat the Duchess of St. Ives, with the Ladies Isabel and Adelaide Multrever. Marion could hear snatches of their

conversation. When the shouting of the ring abated the Duchess' remarks were audible.

"Don't cross your legs, Addy ; it looks so bad. I can't bear to see it . . . and pull your hair out on the left side of your hat—you should tell Elise to pin it to the brim. . . . Isabel, was that Lord Victor you were speaking to just now ? I didn't like to raise my lorgnette. I thought of asking him to come to dinner on the 24th—we want a man." But really they wanted two, poor things ! The flagging girls made no response.

"You shouldn't talk about riding in the Row—awfully vulgar—Rotten Row, *please*." (The reply was lost.) "Did your father introduce you to Mr. Blair, Isabel, in the paddock ? He's standing over there talking to Lady Wardale. He's the son of a very rich textile manufacturer in the North. I'd like you to make his acquaintance ; he's in the Brigade . . . but your father never helps. . . . That's Sir Ernest Cassel talking with the Prince of Wales. He's got a strong German accent—Sir Ernest, I mean. His pretty daughter must be about your age ; she would be a charming friend for you. . . . I think one of you two should go into the cloak-room now to collect our dust-coats. I'll wait here. No, I really can't admire those Lucile dresses—picture gowns look so *outré*—and bare necks are

very theatrical. I wonder they are allowed in the Enclosure."

It was late in the afternoon of Wednesday when Luke Vaughan came up to her. She had been sitting on a seat at a discreet distance from the parterre of pink hydrangeas and geraniums round the Royal Box, and was congratulating herself on having shaken off Colonel Anstruther for a while.

"I've searched for you all day," he said ; " you weren't here yesterday, were you ? "

" Of course I was. If you take racing seriously I can't believe you tried very hard. Do you ? "

He shook his head.

" Father would like purdah to be instituted on all race-courses. Poor dear, he's had rather a horrid day ; he's lost all his money, and as he couldn't lose me, he's had to walk me and feed me. I'm his ' encumbrance,' as servants say of their offspring."

" Has he given you your tea yet ? "

" No."

" Well, then, let's stroll across to the Cavalry Club tent and have some."

" I daren't leave this spot—we are to forgather here after this race. We want to get away before Armageddon."

" Then may I stay here, too, till he comes to claim you ? The horses are just going down." They

stood up to watch them cantering in bunches, brilliant as the fragments broken off a rainbow.

"How do you like Tod Sloan's seat?" she asked, as he flashed past. "My father has a seizure every time he sees him ride. He has written three articles about it, and sent them to *The Field*—none has appeared so far."

"Aesthetically it's deplorable, but it's effective. He rode twenty-one winners the first year he came over, and he keeps on adding to his laurels. I saw him ride five consecutive winners at Newmarket two years ago. The 'crouch' has come to stay; all our jockeys will have to adopt it. Did you back him in the Fernhill Stakes? He won very easily with Hercules."

"But Father says it's all American publicity—and our jockeys will never ride with their knees drawn up to their chins. It's all bunkum about wind-resistance, and he instances Fred Archer's long stirrups."

"What do you say to him then?" Luke was absorbed in marking his card.

"Nothing—I only say things to please and mollify, especially to-day when the grasshopper is a burden. What's 'grasshopper' in French? You ought to know as you're top-boy in Madame Grand-chose's class."

"*Cigale*, of course. I knew that before I was breeched."

"Don't boast, or you will suffer, as La Fontaine's poor grasshopper did. The ant must have been a fiend to taunt her; for she had sung so charmingly all summer, and few artists sing for sheer gladness of heart without hope of reward. Talking of ants, I must try to find mine—aunt with a 'u', that's much worse."

"Is she thrifty and parsimonious?"

"Very. I expect we shall see her in a moment returning from the ring, rolling sovereigns along with her feet, like those ants we watched moving things about in the home woods."

"How heavenly it was there! I've often thought of that first day."

"First day of what?"

"First day of summer—first of my days with you."

A bell rang. "They're off." Luke stood up again and raised his glasses. Marion got up too. Her fatigue had lifted. She enjoyed the soft radiance of the sun on her face and the delicate breezes which stirred her hair. She was not looking at the wide green ribbon of the course as he was, but beyond it at the distance, the blue veil of the temple quivering in the haze.

English summer lay like a spell on earth and sky. It was of velvet loveliness like bloom on a fruit. Primitive strains of music reached her from the far side of the course, the tuneless blare of merry-go-rounds, the strident flourish of tin trumpets. Flags and pennons flew bravely above the tents, and teeming humanity, festive and vociferous, swarmed around them. But she was able to close a shutter between herself and the throng. She was as much alone with Luke Vaughan as she had been in Foxley wood. Instead of this clamour she seemed to hear the song of birds to which they had listened then. When the specks of colour appeared rounding the bend, a silence fell—but there was still music in her heart. . . .

Some enthusiast in the ring called in a raucous voice, "I lay six to one, bar one." . . . "I'll lay a hundred to eight. . . ." Then a confused babel shouted the winner home.

"Well, Tod didn't pull it off that time. Damn! Waldie-Griffith's Veles has won, Sloan was second. The poor grasshopper must have sung, or drunk, too late last night," Vaughan said, putting away his race-glasses. "We must remind him of Dr. Watts' hymn, 'Go to the ant, thou slug-gard'—"

"That's just what I must do."

"No, don't; there's plenty of time. Please stay," he insisted. "Are you coming to-morrow?"

"Of course. I shall drain the Gold Cup to the dregs. . . . I want Mrs. Langtry's Merman to win. D'you think he will? Are you having fun where you are staying?"

"Yes, but I wish I were at Foxley. It was awfully good of your father to ask me to stay with you—" (Marion did not know he had)—"but, alas, I was already booked to the sister of a brother officer. She's got a house at Englemere Green. It's lovely riding in Windsor Great Park in the cool of the evening—the nicest part of the day. Are you too far away to do that?"

"Yes, unfortunately we are. Now I see Aunt Kitty bearing down on us—we shall hear, no doubt, that she has bested Pickersgill."

Mrs. Chatfield was jubilant as she settled herself down heavily on the seat beside Marion. She extricated her eyeglass from among the jingling mass of chains and pendants which adorned her bosom.

"How-de-do?" she nodded, affable but distrait. "What is seven to two on thirty shillings? I won that, but I lost ten shillings on the second, and I backed something for a place. I can't remember its name, but it was beaten out of sight."

"How have you done on the day?"

"Quite well, dear. I never go on form."

Marion turned to Vaughan. "She disregards the unities, time, place, and action, with excellent results; don't you, Aunt Kitty?"

"Let me see. I was winning five pounds before this. I must just reckon up how I stand now. I'll get your Uncle Bernard to help me; he's an excellent mathematician, besides knowing *everything* about Hindu law. I wonder if Mr. Whitney's horse will be favourite this time. Could you find out?" Luke got up to go. Aunt Kitty laid hold of Marion's arm; she was pinioned.

"Help me to work out these figures."

"One moment and I will."

Luke was speaking to her. "Will you lunch with me to-morrow, and I won't be cheated out of giving you tea, as I was to-day? This shall be our rendezvous, this very seat at a quarter past one. I suppose you will be going off now?"

"I expect we are," she admitted regretfully.

She walked a few steps with him.

"I'd like you to wear that dress again, but I dare say that would be all wrong."

Sir Thomas came up to them.

"Here you are; that's capital. Now we've only got to collect Kilmayne and Anstruther's girl." He stopped, however, to talk to Vaughan about an

objection in the three-thirty race. The stewards had done right to overrule it. Marion saw that she would have no opportunity of another word with him.

“ You want to get away now, Father, don’t you ? ”

Luke waited for his reply.

“ I think we ought to. If we stay to the end the crowd will be terrific. Lord Coventry tells me that they’ve never had so many people in the Enclosure, and it will be worse to-morrow—a bear-garden. Would you like to see the Ascot Derby?—I think the Duke of Devonshire will win it with Ecton. Is there anything you want to stay for, Marion ? ”

There was, but she could not tell him.

VIII

It took Marion a week to get over the fatigue of Ascot; a spiritual and physical fatigue. Aunt Kitty had decided to stay with them over Sunday, determined to play up her winnings at Windsor with dire results. The rest of the party had left on Saturday morning, full of mutual assurances that they would do it all over again next year—the same people, the same programme—and they would, she knew they would!

She was re-acclimatising herself to her solitude, but she felt depleted. The routine of small duties crept back on her again, like a gentle but persistent tide—letters, bills, direction of house and garden, the claims of the village. It was as if she had returned from a long journey, as if she had gone back to school, or else come home for the holidays, she knew not which.

When folk grow older they have no appetite for change. Her father had certainly lost his—new persons, new scenes, new ideas were an effort to him. She must not ask him to adjust himself. But wasn't she equally disturbed by them? It's a form

of self-protection, she reasoned, the fear of a raid on the emotions. An unfamiliar footstep on the drawbridge dismays, when one is living circumspectly within an ivory tower. Had she heard it? The footfall of the invader? His knock on the postern was probably the creak of a branch in the wind, his bugle-call to surrender, the hooting of an owl. Absurd to be apprehensive, ridiculous to cry out before you are hurt—to be so happy . . . and yet so sad. The years put one largely out of reach of pain or joy, no other defences are needed.

As she stood by the mirror and pinned a brooch into her cool summer dress she felt she must have attained that security. She planned her day. They would lunch at one : by doing so she would have time to inspect the work at the Mill House. She must be back at three for the Lecture—damn the Lecture! She was in no mood for it. Yet the other one had been a success. The neighbours had played up well to her preposterous idea, and Madame Grandchose had fraternised with them. She had been invited by the Duchess to give some at the Abbey in the winter. “Winter is the best time for Lectures, when we are *hibernating*,” she had said, to Marion’s slight embarrassment. “I feel I can’t stay indoors when the sun shines, but after Christmas we are thrown on our own

resources." Marion wondered what hers could be, but she was glad the Frenchwoman had scored a hit. "But do you think you could give them in English?" the Duchess had added. "It's rather a strain for some of us to follow it all in a foreign language. Just now and again I myself lose a word, and that's annoying. . . . And then of course English is a much *richer* language. One notices that when one reads Shakespeare and compares him to—well, Dumas. And as to Rostand I never feel that Cyrano lives as Falstaff does, though perhaps their noses looked alike. You Latins can't help being a little *risqué*. Of course I don't mind, I am so broad-minded, but one is always a little anxious."

The smiling mask of Madame Grandchose had betrayed no emotion. "*Madame la Duchesse, ce sera comme vous voulez.* You will not object to my accent?"

"On the contrary, broken English is charming. Our Royal Family has a *soupçon* of a foreign accent. . . ."

Marion's father had told her that he intended to join them this afternoon. She would have preferred his absence, but she did not dare say so.

"You'll be frightfully bored, Father. You see, it lasts a whole hour. Can you really sit through that?"

It would look ridiculous, he explained, if he did not put in an appearance, as if he boycotted the whole affair, and to-day he had nothing better to do. Marion did not remind him that this was what he had originally threatened to do.

"Just as you like, darling, but I'm afraid you will be the only man present."

That shook him.—"Won't Dempster come, he's an intellectual? And what about young Vaughan?"

"He might"—she reddened, stupidly, and changed the subject. "Will you be able to see the Mill House this afternoon, early? I said I'd meet Briggs there. They are getting on with the work, but the Baxters want to get in by the end of the month."

"I can't manage it, my dear; I'm going to the paddocks. I promised to show Anstruther the horses. He's coming over from Epsom. We've got to think about our entries—one's always got to think ahead."

He left the breakfast-room, with his pipe in his hand. Always think ahead! Well, that was what she had resolved *not* to do. Sufficient unto the day—Was this care for the morrow a thing for youth or age? Logically it is only the old who should live from day to day, but in actual fact it is children who live in the moment. Her father was a child still.

The old grow long-sighted by the law of nature, their vision cannot focus what is held close before their eyes. She would be unapprehensive, improvident as the young. Young as her father—young as Luke Vaughan. But had she ever possessed that precious essence which is called youth?—like attar of roses it dies not, though at times she felt young in spite of her thirty-eight years. Persistently and ridiculously she exonerated herself for her shortcomings on this score. “I would not have done this, said that, written the other had I been more experienced, older.” Older, good God! how ludicrous! She was already a middle-aged woman. Another ten years and she would be old. She shivered as if the rime of age frosted her limbs.

Perhaps people remain the same age always—till death. Some factor fixes it arbitrarily, some circumstance immobilises them in time, and it is only the physical which thereafter suffers change. She came of age the year of her mother’s death. At this age she had become *châtelaine* of Foxley, had taken Margaret Verlander’s place opposite her father in the pine-panelled dining-room with the portrait of another Marion Verlander in amber satin gown and point-lace collar behind her. Facing her sat the man who was mourning for his wife, bitterly at first as children mourn, and

then with a child's inexhaustible resilience, tenderly, lightly, speaking to Marion of her mother as of a legend when they were together. "My darling Margaret used to . . ."

A premature widower, it was her death which had arrested him in his early fifties. No, it was joy rather than sorrow which held him fast in the prime of manhood. Such joy as when in that spring of 1880 he had won the Grand Military Steeplechase at Sandown, riding the horse bred by himself in those very paddocks he was visiting this afternoon. He was gay and daring then, and to the end she knew he would ride as straight and boldly.

She remembered the talk she had had with Luke Vaughan, when they had sat on the beech-trunk with the wild hyacinths turned from azure to grey at their feet. He had said there were periods in time when one felt the sap of life rise. She had known since that day the upsoaring of the spirit.

The Mill House was being transmogrified, for the Blakes, who had lived there since she could remember, had existed in graceful penury, allowing the place to deteriorate, as they themselves faded. Before the new tenants took it over they had asked for some modernisation, the installation of a bathroom and of acetylene gas. The estate workmen

for several weeks had been painting, plastering, plumbing. They had now reached the final stages in the rejuvenation, and Marion was meeting the clerk of the works to decide on such details as remained.

She found him at the garden gate. Charming as the grounds were, they wore that lost-child look which comes as soon as a house is unoccupied. The Gloire de Dijon roses, blown from the warm brick walls, flung themselves across the mullioned windows. The clematis, unrestrained by wire or nails, dropped in top-heavy clusters on the Madonna lilies in the narrow border. A fringe of white-eyed sweet-williams was choked by the uncut grasses of the verge. Poppy-heads and spikes of lupin turning brown called for a gardener's knife.

"How quickly everything goes back, Briggs," she said; "we must tidy all this up before they arrive. It seems only a few days since the Blakes left. What would they say if they saw it now?"

"It's more than two months ago, Miss Marion, and nothing stands still—it's either going back or coming on all the while."

The workmen's hammering resounded everywhere when they got inside the house. They took a slow survey of the ground floor. Here was the little dining-room, where as a child she had enjoyed

Mrs. Blake's matchless sponge-cakes—crusty outside and melting within—and opposite was the sun-bathed parlour with its deep window-seats. Everything was now painted the colour of Devonshire cream—the walls looked so fresh and inviting that you could have eaten them. The attics had been papered with gay flower designs ; in two of them the high-pitched roof sliced off part of the ceilings, sloping them steeply to the mansard windows.

“ I'd like to live here,” said Marion after Briggs had explained the manner in which the hot-water pipes had been arranged.

“ You ? I think you'd find it very different from Foxley.” But that was just what she wanted, something different.

“ They're going to use the west attics as nurseries, I believe, those little rooms you said were like two beehives.” Marion fancied the children reaching their hands out of their cribs to caress the flowers on the sloping walls : others, real ones, would peep in at them through the casements. She knew very little about children. “ I hope they won't go and drown themselves in the mill-race ; their parents will have to be careful—let's go and look at the wheel.” The inspection had been complete, everything was in good train ; they passed

through the orchard, starred with wild flowers, to the rough brick-and-timber out-building which harboured it.

I used to stand here when I was a child myself, she thought, reluctant to pass out of warmth into cold darkness. I used to be told to stand still, close to the wall, and not move lest some fearful mischief befell me. Then I heard the creak of the wheel, and watched it as it rose from the black pool below, painfully protesting, with groans. Diamonds seemed to be dropping from it, not drops of water—tears perhaps. They fell back into the depths, their crystal was lost, but others appeared edging the wooden blade as it turned over. She stood, as fascinated as she had been in those far-off days, when she had come out of the wizard's cavern with her white socks sprayed from the splashes.

“Wonderful old wheel,” said Briggs. “I reckon it's been doing that job for more than a hundred years, yet it never goes on strike. I wish some of the restless folk nowadays were more like it; they should take a lesson.”

He locked the door of the shed with a key huge as Bluebeard's. “Fasten the old chap in again; I reckon he'll keep at it for a few years longer.”

The light made them blink as they came out. They walked back to Marion's pony-cart. “If you

want to be back at the Hall by three o'clock, you'll have to hurry." She took the reins from a workman, who had been holding Fanny.

"Be careful, Miss; I heard a motor-horn; is she nervous of them?" As the pony jumped into its collar Vaughan's car came throbbing up the lane.

"You've come for the lecture," she called out gaily, pulling up. "What fun! Leave your Jugger-naut here, we're only a mile from the house. I'll drive you." He obeyed. "How nice of you to come this afternoon. I never thought you would. Madame Grandchose *will* be flattered." But Marion had taken a little of the unction to her soul.

Fanny was pulling double, perhaps she was piqued by the advent of a rival whose efficiency was measured by horse-power, and was determined to show what she could do. Luke watched the tight reins, and Marion's straining arms.

"Can you hold her, she seems mad fresh?"

"She is," Marion answered between clenched teeth.

"Then let me drive"; but she only shook her head. The pony was trying to break into a canter.

"Give me the reins," he insisted, and as she made no sign of doing so, he stretched forward and grasped them. She did not resist, but leaned back idly against the cushioned sides of the tub. The

flints flew, scattered far and wide by the pony's spanking feet.

"She's too hot for you, with cars on the road."

"Nonsense—it's only that she's got tired of waiting, or that she's short of work. It's too silly not to be able to hold one's own pony; now let me have her again." But he would not; and after all, it was rather pleasant to sit like this, utterly relaxed, watching his strong wrists control that bouncing mass of muscle and high spirits.

"There's the brougham returning from the station with Madame Grandchose," she exclaimed, when they had passed the lodge. They outdistanced it, waving their hands to the Frenchwoman, who was seated behind the closed windows like a pale mandarin in a pagoda. "We'll have a few minutes with the old girl before the 'company' arrives."

Madame Grandchose expressed pleasure, as Marion expected, on finding Luke was again to be one of her audience. She examined the two figures gravely. "You've been taking a *promenade* together?"

"No, not exactly. We met by chance, on the road."

"Chance gives one delicious surprises and delightful opportunities—are we right in calling it chance? What other name can one give to

destiny ? I'm a fatalist myself, I see in all things a definite design. I follow the stream back to its source, the leaf home to its root. No two people ever come together fortuitously. They are necessary to each other, *le bon Dieu* recognises their interdependence."

"What about those with whom we just brush wings ?"

"They too have some place in the jigsaw. They fit themselves in ; we find out later the little blank space to which they belong. It may seem unimportant when the picture is building up, but you can't complete the puzzle without including it. Where and how was it that you met this afternoon ?"

Marion explained. She saw Madame Grandchose was not listening. She is thinking about her lecture, she decided, and wondered if so assured a person could ever feel nervous.

But the *conférencière* was not pondering on her theme. She was watching Marion's eyes, as they watched Luke. It was only for a few minutes, however ; the anxious hostess had to see all was in order in the house. She left them.

"What a gracious creature she is," the Frenchwoman murmured. "She is like a cadence of poetry, like the refrain of some deep song. You have been friends a long while ?"

"I have known the Verlanders slightly for some time."

"Then I advise you to improve your acquaintance."

Vaughan and Madame Grandchose made their way into the house. Before crossing the threshold she paused to look up at the façade. "What a lot of arrivals and departures this doorway has witnessed—joyous home-comings, tragic good-byes, cheerful au-revoirs. It has seen *calèches* turn in the fore-court, and litters carried up these shallow steps, coaches draw up, jingling with the spurs of their postilions—coffins pass the lintel on the shoulders of the bearers. Christening-parties have left this house, to return with a child, the salt of wisdom on its lips. Yes, Monsieur le Capitaine, the entrance to a house is an entrance to life itself. We must not linger on the threshold. How long are you remaining here to-day?"

"I must leave soon after your charming talk has ended."

"*C'est dommage*," she commented, depositing her cloak and umbrella in the staircase hall. "*C'est bien dommage*."

As soon as Madame Grandchose was enthroned on her platform she began to throw nods and

smiles around her. The breadth of the grin she offered Miss Bates contrasted with the more restrained greetings she exchanged with Mrs. Piercey and Mrs. Ames. She seemed to know exactly how far she could go with the Duchess.

The sunblinds, though they darkened the room, did not prevent its being very hot. The lecturer held a paper fan, which she kept opening and shutting. The sound made by the little Japanese thing, as its bamboo sticks spread out, or snapped together, pleased her, obviously. From time to time she arched her wrist coquettishly and fanned her brow, causing the ostrich feathers on her hat to stir lethargically. She was giving her listeners time to settle down.

Marion wondered how she could have chosen a dark red dress for such a red-hot day. She imagined the wearer ordering it at her dressmaker's, in some little evil-smelling apartment in a by-street in Paris. "*La teinte grenat est beaucoup portée, Madame,*" the seamstress might have said. "*D'ailleurs elle fait jeune !*" That must have been the genesis of this garnet-coloured costume. It accentuated the generous curves of Madame Grandchose's figure and the deadly pallor of her wide good-natured face.

After a few minutes she beckoned for Marion to

approach the stage, and requested that a window behind her should be closed.

“The least draught affects me dangerously; there are people like that—over-sensitive ones. *Un courant d’air l’a emportée* will be written on my death certificate.”

After her instructions had been carried out, the temperature of the room rose. But they were in her hands . . . and she was on her feet. She gave a light tap to the table with her fan, and bowed courteously. “*Bonjour, Mesdames, Messieurs.*”

In a few loosely strung sentences she explained that her talk this afternoon would necessarily be different in character to the one she had given on the subject of Madame Mohl. The background of the canvas to-day was crowded with well-known historical figures . . . it was the picture of an epoch as much as the portrait of a woman. She hoped the critics would appreciate her difficulty—she asked for their indulgence and she began forthwith.

IX

A MASS of bibliography surrounds the figure of Madame Récamier. I don't expect you to plough your way through it, even if the few little things I am going to tell you about her to-day may whet your appetite for more. But should you be fascinated by her story, I would advise you to read Sainte-Beuve's pages. Few as they are, they seem to me to contain her very essence, and when I have been bewildered by the views of her contemporaries—they are so various and so contradictory—I always return to him. In his crystalline prose, she seems to rise before me in all her charm and mystery. She lives for me again—and she enslaves me, as she did all those with whom she came in contact.

Mary Mohl, as I told you in my last *conférence*, enjoyed long years of her friendship. She begins her monograph on Juliette Récamier (which I also commend to you) by saying that those who never knew her would find it is as difficult to picture her as she really was as to create a fresh flower from a dried specimen in an album.

These two women influenced each other strongly.

In the alchemy of their natures some affinity drew them together, for two more opposite ones never existed. I will not admit that Juliette Récamier is a typical Frenchwoman, or that Mary Mohl had all the characteristics of your nation ; but in their differences we realise the wide divergence which must always separate the Latin from the Anglo-Saxon. As, through sudden flashes, we recognise a likeness between one individual and another, so certain racial traits in them will often give us the explanation we need in order to understand their conduct.

To-day I am going to discuss our subject very tenderly. Sainte-Beuve says no woman may be treated by a biographer with the same brusque frankness as a man, even after death a woman is still *un peu notre contemporaine*. Juliette Récamier has never really died, and in speaking or writing of her she still commands a measure of reticence. So you will have to judge her as much by what I leave unsaid as by what I say.

She was an enigma to many who knew her intimately ; how much more puzzling she must be to us ! Her own apologia I will recall to you—there is a poignant note of sorrow in it, but it seems as complete a summing-up as a whole volume could contain : “ *J’avais trop de qualités pour mes défauts.* ”

In 1812 the Comtesse de Boigne wrote to her :
 “ You are the least forgotten person—that is because you are amiable, pretty and charming, it is because you are mild, gentle and obliging, and that everyone’s souvenirs of you are pleasing ones ; memories which flatter the self-esteem and caress the heart. Your spontaneous, engaging and affectionate friendliness has discovered the way to persuade each one that you can never be indifferent to his welfare. . . . You know how much I admire this magical goodness of yours—and it is because you are good that you have turned so many heads, that you have been the despair of so many hearts. They do not know it, but nevertheless it is true.”

I would like the few bare facts which I am putting before you this afternoon to show that Madame Récamier’s place in the literary life of the first half of the nineteenth century was not attained by ambitious intrigue. It was through goodness, dressed in charm, that she won it. An alabaster purity of character overlay the frail texture of her soul. Neither the corrosive acid of personal disappointment, nor the rough bludgeoning of the times she lived in, could take effect on this. Smooth, polished and flawless she remained.

On her tomb in the Cimetière du Nord, below the cross which marks the place, is the inscription

which she chose from the 133rd Psalm : “ *Ecce quam bonum habitare fratres in unum.* ” She had sought peace diligently, and through life we find her turning discords into harmony.

Juliette Bernard, born at the end of 1777, was the daughter of a notary in Lyons. The good-looking, estimable solicitor would have begun and ended his life there but for the adventurous spirit of his wife. A provincial town offered no opportunities to the attractive blonde. “ *Paris la grand’ville* ” beckoned her, and she decided to remove herself thither as soon as she had paved the way for the social and financial advancement of her husband. In 1784, through her influence over Monsieur de Calonne, she obtained for him the lucrative post of *Receveur des Finances*. It has never been known how she established herself on good terms with this aristocrat, for in those days a little bourgeoisie, however seductive and enterprising, would find approach to a *grand seigneur* who was also a Minister of the Crown difficult, if not impossible.

For the two Bernards good-bye now to Lyons, with its mean streets and parochial society; but the little Juliette shall for the present be left with an aunt at Villefranche, later she will be sent to the Convent of La Déserte in Lyons—it would be folly

to expose a child of her age to the conditions prevailing in the capital. Only old Monsieur Simonard should accompany them. He was the friend of the family—at least it suited Madame Bernard to give him this label. Later when things became settled, it would be time for her to join them ; and in the meantime the couple were learning to acclimatise themselves to their new surroundings.

And what a Paris it was the Lyonnais had come to ! Perhaps Madame Bernard regretted exchanging her southern nest for a little house on the left bank of the Seine—all the refuge she had now against the storms of the Revolution, and these were rising each day till the city streets ran blood with the unholy sacrifices of the *Coupeuse de Têtes*. The pretty blonde was determined not to lose *her* head, for even those days could be turned to good account. She saw the opportunity of building a considerable fortune with the aid of powerful protectors. In Monsieur de Calonne she had one, and in Barère, one of the worst of the Terrorists, another, and in Monsieur Bernard she had already an accommodating and complaisant spouse. The family fortunes prospered in a somewhat inexplicable manner (nobody enquired too closely) and its social status improved. Their house became the meeting-ground of a lot of interesting and well-known people ;

it was filled with charming *bibelots*, and the prettiest of these as she grew older, admired by all who came, was their daughter Juliette. Old friends from Lyons were eagerly welcomed by the Bernards, most especially Monsieur Jacques Récamier, a former hat manufacturer, who had also migrated from their native town, and had become affluent and successful in the capital. He had loved the mother, and how much he delighted in the pretty child. Whilst excellent wine and food were offered to the guests—the Bernards kept open house—he feasted his eyes on her bright curls and rose-leaf complexion. He caressed the little creature, to whom, in previous years, he had brought dolls and sugar-plums, but who now was no longer the bewitching baby he had petted in the south, but a tall, dazzling beauty of fifteen, the age at which another Juliet had been sought in marriage.

At such moments, in the calm of the rue des Saints-Pères household, Récamier forgot the wild massacres he had witnessed on his way there. Paris had gone mad, Heaven knew where its dementia might end, and this was no time to leave one's treasure unguarded. Here was Juliette, a pearl—his pearl. She would be safer with him than with those who had her in their keeping. So the bargain was concluded, and three months after Louis XVI had

perished on the scaffold, on a day when the triumph of Marat was being celebrated by the foulest orgies, the bridegroom of forty-three and his child bride were declared man and wife, before a magistrate *en bonnet rouge*, to the mutual satisfaction of those who had arranged the match.

Man and wife—but were these two, who signed the register at the Hôtel-de-Ville in April (*Floréal*), Year One of La Liberté, father and daughter too? Gossips shrugged their shoulders and lifted their eyebrows, and the best informed maintained then and in after years that this mock marriage was Madame Bernard's ingenious way of securing for her daughter the banker Récamier's fortune and position, whose child she was. Madame Lenormant, Madame Récamier's niece and biographer, who does not burke the question, states that Récamier's relations with her were never anything but paternal, and though Juliette did not once allude to the circumstances of her marriage, she admitted long years after to a friend that she had often been very melancholy when she was young. "I could not reconcile myself to my position."

In the horror of those abnormal times, when the shadow of death lay across each man's threshold, Jacques Récamier's figure was a familiar one to those who crowded round the steps of the guillotine.

When questioned afterwards how he endured the gruesome peep-show, he replied that he was preparing himself for a similar fate, which might at any hour befall him. Personally, I am inclined to the belief that this ordeal was devised by the banker in order that he might appear a sympathiser with the extremists. Be that as it may, it is a fact that, when the Thermidoriens took their revenge, and Robespierre with some seventy others of his kith had themselves paid the grim forfeit, Jacques Récamier's fortune and his neck remained intact.

His was a cautious nature ; it would have been indiscreet to advertise these properties, still less the possession of a pretty wife, and though the dawn of calmer days lit the landscape, the newly married couple lived in strict retirement during the early part of the Directory.

It was a period of painful reconstruction. The only fortunes unconfiscated were those belonging to bankers and army contractors. All distinctions of rank had been abolished, no private entertainments were given. Such of the *émigrés* who had returned to France lay in hiding, and, though the appetite for amusement had returned, the only fêtes held were the sordid assemblies in the public gardens of Tivoli and Beaujon—no fit places to exhibit such a flower as Juliette. Wiser to wait till times were

more propitious. Meanwhile squandermania was the order of the day; speculation was rife and all banking interests prospered exceedingly; and the city had gone dancing-mad. Even some of the churches were turned into resorts where those fêting the new government might indulge in their craze. As every period of history is adorned by its own blossoming of fair women, so the Directoire had discovered beauties, hitherto unknown, with which to garland every public rendezvous. Vast crowds gathered to watch the procession of carriages drive towards Longchamp. In them were seated goddesses in transparent muslins which scarcely veiled the beauty of the limbs they draped. Leopard-skins to protect those ivory shoulders on cold days, but nothing for their naked feet but the gold straps of their sandals. Golden girdles were clasped below the swell of the young breasts, and jewelled chaplets held the clustering curls of classic coiffures. This was not Paris; this was Rome.

As the Parisien of that day lived on his doorstep, it was not long before another besides Madame Tallien became the talk of the town. In 1798 Madame Récamier's portrait had been exhibited; now all were anxious to see her. Wherever she went, masses surged, fought, struggled to catch a glimpse of—a girl of dazzling prettiness in white,

with a linen kerchief, bound across her head. For Juliette, after following fashion's wildest dictates, had chosen to wear a prim uniform of her own. The astute husband allowed the curious such treats in small rations only. Juliette shall not cheapen herself, indeed her value must be raised in the eyes of the people who had begun to count—not this dust-stained, sweating rabble which encumbered the pavements. At the Church of St. Roch she was invited to make the collection and, at the passage of the angelic being, godlessness and vice seemed to be exorcised. Her *quête* amounted to an incredible sum, and the two gentlemen who escorted her down the aisles had difficulty in protecting her from the exuberant enthusiasm of the congregation. Folks climbed up the pillars, hoisted themselves on to the side altars to see the woman now generally acknowledged as *la "Belle des belles."*

It was to honour a successful young general, lately returned from the Italian front, that the Directory gave a reception at the Luxembourg. In order to have a better view of this young man called Bonaparte seated under a statue of Liberty, and of the five Directors, ridiculously travestied as Roman senators in costumes designed for them by David, Juliette, indiscreet herself as those who had

mobbed her in the church, stood up in the big amphitheatre. Barras' speech, which had followed Talleyrand's, was lost in a tumult of applause. General Bonaparte, indignant at the unseemly outburst, turned his head to discover the cause of the interruption. He gave the slim white figure such a menacing look that she sat down, alarmed. That angry challenge from him who was soon to become First Consul was the prelude to a bitter enmity.

This, as I have said, was a period of reconstruction. It was very natural that, as time went on, the architects concerned with the rebuilding of social life should become more fastidious in the choice of their material. The ignoble, the blatant, the vulgar did very nicely as the rubble for the foundations, but, now that the edifice was rising, it was desirable to find fairer substance for their object.

It was not enough—or it was too much—that society should be content to spend an evening at Citoyen Barras' house, or at a subscription ball, where all might have the entrée. Monsieur Récamier decided to set another stage for his wife. He knew that the house of Neckar, father of Madame de Staël, was for sale. It stood in the rue du Mont Blanc (now called the Chaussée d'Antin). Once reconditioned and refurnished according to the classical

taste of the day, the *hôtel* would be a casket worthy of the jewel he proposed to lodge there. When the purchase of the house was in prospect, the banker brought Madame de Staël to visit Juliette—she was left alone with the lady caller, strangely dressed, she tells us, in a morning gown and little flower-wreathed hat. No introduction was made, and it was only in the course of conversation that Madame Récamier discovered who her visitor was: a thrilling moment for the beauty, who had lately been enjoying the works of the distinguished authoress. The intellectual poured out an embarrassing measure of compliments on the banker's wife, and did not release her till the sale of her father's house had been assured.

And now for the Récamiers to work on it. It would be indiscreet to alter the modest outward proportions—Luxury must hide its head demurely while thousands were still dying of starvation, but inside there need be no stint. Those who were invited to the first parties given here, brought back such extravagant reports of what they had seen that it was no wonder all Paris was yearning to be received. *Acajou*—mahogany—that beautiful new wood, had been used extensively, enriched with fine ormolu and mirrors, huge sheets, all of one piece. That, too, was a novelty. There was a

Pompeian flavour in the details of the decoration. Urns and Roman lamps hung above the low-toned walls and fabrics. Juliette's bedroom was the masterpiece. Golden swans supported the diaphanous canopy around the mahogany couch where that other milk-white swan sought her rest. No one who came here did not beg permission to visit her sanctuary. Indeed, she often offered to show it them, taking the visitor's arm, and saying in what Madame Mohl describes as her velvety manner, "*Voulez-vous voir ma chambre ?*" On one occasion, during a large party, the hostess, feeling faint, was obliged to retire to her bed. A friend was admitted to enquire after her health ; others, seeing the door ajar, pressed forward till the whole company filled the room, and those who could not succeed in getting through the doorway, mounted on chairs to look over the shoulders of the better-placed spectators. Monsieur Récamier did not protest. He merely covered theseats of the armchairs with pieces of paper, that their rich damask coverings should not be injured. It was, as you see, a curious age, or rather an age of curiosity.

Who were the eager guests who crowded to the house? Some were the old friends of her parents, who remembered Juliette as the sweet Bernard child, Monsieur de la Harpe, Lemontez,

the historian, Barère, the politician. But, from the banker's point of view, it was wisdom that the greater number of those received in it should be the men of the hour, men of influence. Since the return of that able thirty-year-old General Bonaparte from Egypt, the salon of Madame Récamier—already clever Juliette's Monday receptions had assumed the salon status—was alive with uniforms. Brilliant splashes of colour woke the neutral-tinted rooms, spurs jingled, sabretaches swung, light from the classical lamps above burnished the gold lace on the tunics. All the aides-de-camp of the military genius who, on the 18th Brumaire, proclaimed himself First Consul of the French Republic, were invited to the rue du Mont Blanc. Lannes, Junot, Marmont, Murat (brother-in-law of the genius), Eugène de Beauharnais (his stepson) received pressing invitations, and accepted them. But in those days, when the political barometer was unstable, many weather prophets predicted change. It would have been madness for the banker to write off all other possible assets on the balance-sheet. There was always the probability of the restoration of the Monarchy and, from Juliette's point of view, the *ancien régime* charmers gave a delicious bouquet to any drawing-room. The aristocrats were as much ornament to a house as the *objets de vertu*

placed in a cabinet. So the Duc de Guignes, the cousins Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, and many other royalists moved with the glorious aloofness of their *caste nobilière* amongst all these soldiers of fortune.

Early in life Madame Récamier decided that her sandalled feet should always tread—and dance—on no-man's-land. The pretty bourgeoisie vowed she would not keep all her eggs in one basket, and her cautious husband commended her. That made it all the more annoying that her flirtation with Lucien Bonaparte, the First Consul's brother, should have ended so disastrously. In this absurd battle of love-letters she came out badly ; at one moment, when the tone of his became more passionate than she liked, she consulted her husband on the subject. Jacques Récamier advised her not to risk an open rupture : to make an enemy of Napoleon Bonaparte might jeopardise, ruin perhaps, the future of his banking house. So the affair was allowed to peter out prosaically, though Lucien asked for the return of his letters ; they were too valuable evidence of the virtue of the recipient to be handed back to him. Besides, they were an amusing *lecture* for her anti-Bonapartist friends, who, with Juliette, died with laughter at his mistakes in French and spelling. It was bad luck that the merriment

occasioned by these public readings should have come to his brother's ears.

One of the royalists, a constant visitor at the Hôtel Récamier, looked askance at this and, indeed, at all his hostess' flirtations. Mathieu de Montmorency was a man of rare spiritual and intellectual elevation. His soul had been tried in the furnace of suffering. In his early youth he had been wild, gay and fashionable, and had gone out to America with La Fayette, as did many of the young aristocrats of the day. On his return to France, he had thrown in his lot with that section of the aristocracy who believed in the regeneration of their country. As deputy to the States-General, he had proposed the abolition of the privileges of the nobility. In 1792 he emigrated to Switzerland and, whilst there, he learned that his brother, the Abbé de Laval, had perished on the guillotine. That sorrow affected him profoundly and changed the whole course of his existence. From this hour he became a fervent Christian, and he devoted the rest of his life to the service of his friends and the claims of charity. When he made Madame Récamier's acquaintance, he resolved to be sheet-anchor to this frail craft launched on such perilous seas. The loveliest pages in Juliette's story are those which record the exquisite tenderness he felt for her till the day of

his death. Mathieu de Montmorency's constant presence in the Récamier house set the tone there. All Rabelaisian wit was banished, the conversation was said to be "anglicised." The hostess was quick to realise that, in order to place her salon on the correct plane, the elegant traditions which flourished at the end of the last century must be revived. Montmorency explained to her what these were. No one more anxious than she to set her house—and garden—in order. There were weeds in the latter which must be uprooted, people who belonged to her past, and were not worthy of her present—out with them! Nothing coarse or ugly should be allowed to flourish in the parterre.

But oh, what a pity that her little intrigue with Lucien Bonaparte had failed in its object!—the object which lay nearest her heart—direct approach to the glamorous First Consul. She became critical of all the Bonapartist crew; she sought the society of the malcontents, she befriended General Moreau, his only rival in the battlefield, and Moreau's young wife, till the General was arrested on a charge of conspiracy against the Consulate. That gave her a pause; she had been playing with fire again!

It was diplomatic to close her doors to all for a while, so the sublimated mondaine declared to her circle that true happiness can only be found in the

pursuit of the arts. Her old friend Hubert Robert—that artist who painted with mist and silver—arranged a studio for her next his own, and to this she hurried each morning, draped in her becoming *égyptienne* all trimmed in soft rich fur, *frissonnante* and sparkling. Though she may not have profited by his drawing-lessons, other artists who met her there had the opportunity of feasting their eyes on her loveliness. It was here that David saw her ; to see her was to wish to paint her. His picture hangs in the Louvre. Who does not know it ? Through that canvas Juliette will live for ever in the hearts of the romantics.

When it was exhibited, women talked of nothing but her clothes. Her white dress—was it true she never wore anything but white ? but wasn't there a white satin-and-gold which had made history ? They sighed as their dressmakers showed them styles and samples. How could their toilettes attain such perfection ?

But men talked only of her eyes.

During the short-lived peace of Amiens, English people hurried to Paris and were hospitably entertained by the banker's wife. She was pressed to make a return visit to them in London, and, on a May day in that year, Juliette appeared in Kensington Gardens under a white veil which fell from her

hat to the hem of her gown. Those who had not the privilege of seeing her at the parties given for her by the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Salisbury, and Lady Melbourne were fortunate in catching a fleeting vision of her as she moved, nymph-like, against a background of green trees. When she returned to Paris, Bonaparte, irritated by rumours that his ministers attended all her receptions, exclaimed testily, "Since when are the sessions of the Cabinet held at Madame Récamier's house?"

In 1804 General Moreau was tried and condemned to transportation to America. Twenty others associated in the conspiracy were executed. Madame Récamier attended the trial, and spent her days attempting to console his wife. When she came into court, the prisoner rose to salute her. This was reported to Bonaparte, who sent her a message that she was not to return there. The blood of these victims had scarcely dried on his hands when the innocent young Duc d'Enghien was also put to death. Universal indignation was expressed, but why stop to bother? A little more or less blood . . . what matter! The First Consul had other things to think of. In early summer he proclaimed the Empire.

Though the coronation was not to be held till December, the Imperial Household had to be

appointed, *la maison* of Napoleon, his Empress, his mother and his sisters. Fouché, Minister of Police, hurried to Juliette's house, in which he was an habitué, and explained to her that his master was prepared to waive the slight hostility which her salon had reflected and that he had been charged to offer her the post of lady-in-waiting to the Empress. When Madame Récamier instanced the several occasions on which his policy had outraged her sense of justice, he swept these arguments aside petulantly. "You talk as a child," said he. "Remember he needs guidance. He wants a counsellor, a friend. You would be *amie de l'Empereur*. Think it over."

Juliette thought it over, and talked it over too. Her royalist friends lifted pious hands in horror. What, she was ready to betray them—to sell the pass to a usurper whose downfall was assured? England was arming against him, Austria, Russia and Prussia too. A short while and the King would come into his own again. Mathieu de Montmorency shook his head sadly at her, but her husband, with a rather fine detachment, left her free in the matter. Mathieu's words prevailed.

Strange *volte-face* that Juliette who, in the days of the Consulate, would have given her all to draw the young Corsican to her side, should tell his

minister that she was not prepared to become lady-in-waiting to the Empress, still less *amie* of the Emperor. Fouché never entered her house again.

Monsieur Récamier's attitude of strict neutrality in this matter is all the more admirable because, at this time, his business was passing through a period of severe stress. Failures of many financial houses had been provoked by unscrupulous speculation, and for a while the Bank of France itself had been appreciably shaken. In 1806, two years later, Juliette's husband came into her room to tell her that, unless he could procure an advance of a million francs from the Bank of France, for which he was able to offer excellent cover, his own would be obliged to suspend payment. The request for the loan, not an extraordinary one at a moment when the Government was doing everything to re-establish public confidence, was instantly and harshly refused.

The sensation caused by the catastrophe was immense ; many smaller firms were ruined in its train. The Récamiers behaved with great nobility. Jacques' creditors proved their esteem for him by placing him at the head of the liquidation, and Juliette gave up everything, her personal jewels, her plate, her furniture. The lovely *hôtel* in the rue du Mont Blanc was put up for sale. There can be no

doubt that the Récamiers' failure could have been averted had she not wounded the pride of the Emperor. She was reaping the whirlwind of his displeasure.

Where would the pearl torn from the rich casket find safety now ? Madame de Staël, a companion in misfortune, wrote her many exuberant letters of condolence from her exile at Coppet, urging Juliette to make her home there. She agreed, but through accepting the invitation to Switzerland, both she and the faithful Mathieu de Montmorency, who accompanied her thither, further incurred the Emperor's wrath. Both were banished to a distance of forty miles from Paris. This ban lasted four years.

Part of this time she spent at Châlons, and, for the rest, she travelled—and compensations came her way. It was at Coppet that the Prince Augustus of Prussia, nephew of Frederick the Great, fell a victim to her charms. This handsome young officer, taken prisoner at the battle of Saalfeld, was on parole at Geneva. In such romantic surroundings, in an atmosphere coloured with the philosophy of Rousseau and of his disciples, Juliette was easily persuaded by Madame de Staël to write to her husband and plead for a divorce. The young prince waited eagerly for his reply. When it came, in

a temperate letter full of sound common sense, Monsieur Récamier did not refuse to give his wife her freedom—had he ever refused her anything ? But he also appealed to all the generous sentiments of her heart—he knew how many she possessed; and, though he admitted she had a right to make this claim, he recalled to her the affection he had shown her since her earliest childhood, and ended by a request that, if separation did take place, Juliette should make her life outside of France. The vision of her husband growing old and friendless, despoiled of the fortune he had been so delighted to lavish on her, and deprived of the treasure nearest his heart, rose before her. Memories of him, going back to the old Lyons days when, as she sat on her mother's lap, he had indulged and petted her, gave her conscience no peace. Good Monsieur Récamier, who had brought such pretty toys to her then, kind Monsieur Récamier, whose powerful protection had stood between her and the passions of the revolutionaries—and lastly, Jacques Récamier, her partner and the associate in her triumphant social career, how could she abandon him ? His mild and dignified protests could not be dismissed.

Much to Madame de Staël's annoyance, she made up her mind to check the ardours of the Prussian princeling ; she begged for time ; she temporised,

she prevaricated, she promised to give him a favourable answer later, but she never did.

We think of her during those years of banishment, serene, undismayed, drifting from place to place in her white draperies—picking flowers where she could find them, laying them in the bosom of her gown till they faded and were replaced by others. But one rare bloom she found when staying in her native city : and this she kept, its petals never fell. Strange that she should have cherished such a humble herb. It had no outward beauty, but it was an everlasting, fragrant as rosemary. Juliette met Ballanche at Lyons, and from that moment to the day of his death, the poet-philosopher lived only in her and for her. What a child of fortune to be guarded by two such angels as Mathieu de Montmorency and Ballanche ; with them beside her to guide and comfort her, she need fear no evil. . . .

Madame Récamier was in Rome in 1814, when every campanile in the eternal city pealed a joyful *Te Deum* to commemorate the overthrow of the tyrant. She witnessed the rapture of the population, as the young Italian nobles dragged the state carriage to St. Peter's. Pius VII, overwhelmed by

emotion, blessed the tens of thousands which acclaimed him ; he must have lost all hope of kneeling before its high altar again. It was not only the tidings of the return of a sovereign from captivity, but the triumph of a martyr which every bell announced, and joybells were ringing in Juliette's heart also. She was now able to re-enter the sanctuary of past years. Lovelier than ever, crowned with the halo of persecution, she prepared to re-enter the *Royaume de France* ; it was also her kingdom, for “ *la Belle des belles* ” had reigned there and was to reign again.

All her friends were waiting for her in Paris. Her good husband, too, who had retrieved a great part of his fortune. The Restoration was the beginning of a new and joyful era in her life : 1814 dawned gloriously till, out of the cloudless skies, came the news of Bonaparte's escape from Elba. But the thundercloud spent itself quickly—blue skies again, though Paris had for a second time the mortification of seeing foreign uniforms in her streets—but had not French troops bivouacked in the palaces of every continental sovereign ? The prestige of our arms was still so great that the Allies seemed scarcely to believe in their own victory. A shade of respect and deference was noticeable in their attitude towards the French nation.

It was at Madame de Staël's house that Juliette met the Duke of Wellington ; a few memoranda—notes jotted down for a book of memoirs she never wrote—are of interest :

“ Lord Wellington's visits become frequent. . . . Continuation of his visits. . . . Madame de Staël wishes me to obtain influence over him. He writes me unmeaning notes which all resemble each other. . . . I see him again after the battle of Waterloo. I did not expect him. My annoyance at this visit. . . . He comes back in the evening and finds my door closed.”

It is obvious that on this occasion her patriotism was wounded. Between her and the glory of the Iron Duke a figure interposed itself. The shadow of a hat appeared on the wall, and those haunting eyes, which in times past had followed her with enmity, commanded her not to bow the knee before his conqueror.

But few were here now to call “ *Vive l'Empereur !* ” All those who made her immediate circle were tasting the sweets of office. They were overjoyed at the re-establishment of the House of Bourbon. How wise Mathieu's advice had been, warning her not to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. Had she been *l'amie* of Napoleon, how could she be, as she was now, wel-

comed by the Faubourg families—and the Faubourg St. Germain people meant much to her, though not to the exclusion of others. One could say to Madame Récamier, “Your friends the Liberals, or your friends the Ultras,” with equal truth. As I have said before, she had set herself to be a national of no-man’s-land, and it was in this uncharted zone that she exploited the emotions of Benjamin Constant. The love-affair with this brilliant sceptic, though passionate on his side, did not last long. What she admired in him most was his determined opposition to despotism, his hatred of tyranny. But when, fascinated by Napoleon, during the Hundred Days he had consented to be nominated one of the Council of State, she saw that the idol possessed feet of clay. And then, hadn’t he always belonged to Madame de Staël? And Madame de Staël lay dying. On the 14th July 1817 this much-loved, loving friend of Juliette passed away.

During that summer a new and absorbing interest had come to Madame Récamier—Monsieur de Chateaubriand and she had come together in that sick-room. What a flutter in the dovecot (the new house in the rue d’Anjou, in which Juliette installed herself at this time) when the guardian angels discovered that from henceforth her life would be dominated by him. They beat their wings, in vain ;

they admonished, they exhorted. At first the two felt gratified that the author of the *Génie du Christianisme* should pay her homage. Then, as the intimacy grew apace, they became suspicious, apprehensive, distraught. Montmorency and Ballanche took counsel together. Nothing but unhappiness could result for her from this erotic attachment. Remember, they were men as well as guardian angels, and they felt the bitter pangs of jealousy! Years afterwards she admitted to someone that "No head could be more completely turned than mine was by Monsieur de Chateaubriand. I used to cry all day"—and very probably Ballanche and Montmorency cried also, but there was no calling halt to her eager feet. Mathieu's letters of warning are written in his heart's blood. She is, he wrote, forging a chain of wretchedness for herself "which will make those who love you even more wretched than yourself"; but, heedless, she wound the links round her neck and arms. They were heavy, yes, but the chain was of gold—at least she thought so. He implored her to consider only the welfare of her soul, and Ballanche prescribed a régime for it: the Vicomte's visits to her were to be limited to small doses, and, as a corrective to these, he advised her to begin on a translation of Petrarch's poetry. Juliette often left Mathieu's

letters unanswered, but she started on the literary exercise suggested, and Ballanche was called in to help her with the rhyming.

The Vicomte de Chateaubriand, the most spendthrift of men, was passing through one of his many financial crises and was being faced with having to sacrifice his country-house in the Vallée au Loup. Madame Récamier proposed to buy it for him, and Mathieu de Montmorency (this shows the temper of the man) agreed to put up half the purchase money. But a second failure of the Récamier bank in 1819 thwarted her intentions. She had already advanced half her personal fortune to avert the disaster.

Once again her home was broken up, the house in the rue d'Anjou followed the fate of the one in the rue du Mont Blanc. This time she decided not to embark upon another. Pride forbade her to stoop to a more humble scale of life, but there would be no loss of pride if she determined to live in strict retirement within convent walls.

Indeed a romantic atmosphere attached to those ladies of the *haute noblesse* who had sought refuge from pecuniary—and other—embarrassments in the Abbaye au Bois. She resolved to join their ranks. Madame Récamier a nun, or half a nun, would be an appealing figure and, though no men were

allowed to live in the apartments rented by the Dames Chanoinesses de St. Augustin, they would be free to visit her here. It remained only to find a suitable haven for her husband, and to make him promise for ever to damp down his speculative fires. She established him with old Monsieur Simonard (who had always made his home with her family) in a tiny lodging close to the Abbaye. Ballanche took a room just opposite it. All was once more in order, and every afternoon, as the clock struck three, the Vicomte de Chateaubriand might now be seen walking up the rue de Seine on his way to his love. Each morning an amorous *billet* to her preceded the visit. People came to the window to watch his commanding figure, swash-buckler and *ci-devant*, ascetic and libertine, strolling to his rendezvous. A fresh rose-bud adorned the buttonhole of his perfectly cut redingote, one hand was plunged into the becoming waistcoat, the other swung his tasselled cane.

It was not till the tête-à-tête had ended that Juliette's door was opened to the guardian angels, and a less heavenly host which thronged her convent cell, as it pleased Chateaubriand to call the charming little apartment, which enjoyed a wide view over the gardens ("corbeille verdoyante"), house-tops and church towers, to the distant wooded

heights of Sèvres. Chateaubriand describes the birds seeking refuge at night-time under Juliette's shutters, like him, finding shelter there, silence and peace from the tumult of the city.

Old Ballanche formed part of the household—came and went on errands, made himself useful to Juliette and her guests—when he left his modest furnished room, filled to overflowing with portraits of her, he only left it when there was a chance of seeing the original. He scarce seemed conscious of the change of scene. His old dilapidated *fautueil* was still at Juliette's side; here he found happiness, where'er it stood, this simple lovely soul on whom Nature had bestowed a degree of ugliness beyond the limit permitted to all clever men. Madame Récamier's new abode became the vogue. More and more people came to visit her. Acquaintance with the recluse (who was no recluse whatever, and enjoyed her outings to the Théâtre Français) became the acid test of social success. Recruits were added to her court. Jean-Jacques Ampère was the youngest. One day, when he found her alone, she questioned him whether the frequency of his visits implied his admiration for her pretty niece (afterwards Madame Lenormant). "Ah," cried the twenty-two-year-old boy, falling at her feet in a storm of tears, "*ce n'est pas pour elle que*

je viens." She had in future to calm and soothe him : cure him of his love for her she could not.

In 1821 Mathieu de Montmorency became Minister of Foreign Affairs ; he lost no time in appointing the Vicomte de Chateaubriand Ambassador to St. James's, but a little later the rivals met at the Congress of Verona and at Vienna. Letters to her from both these during their absence from Paris are bristling with reciprocal hostility. In 1826, after Mathieu had received the title of Duke, in reward for his public services, and had been elected to the Académie, thanks to Madame Récamier's intrigues, the Ultra Ministry came in and he was appointed *Gouverneur* to Charles X's grandson, the Duc de Bordeaux. But on Good Friday of that year, whilst at prayer in the Church of St. Thomas Aquinas, his pure spirit keeping vigil by the Cross received a summons to join the Company of Heaven. The last years of his life had been clouded by the influence which Chateaubriand exercised over Juliette, and remorse was added to her grief in losing him. Three years later Monsieur Récamier died at the age of eighty. During his last illness, permission was granted for him to be moved into her apartment at the convent.

With the advent of Louis-Philippe the Liberals

became masters of the field, and the cleavage between those who were now basking in the sunshine of prosperity and the dispossessed Ultras was marked by intense bitterness.

Madame Récamier was untainted by party spirit. She had lived through a period ironically misnamed the years of "la Liberté." She had known the tyranny of Napoleon that followed them, and whilst she deplored the circumstances under which the government of Charles X had broken up on the rocks of an eagerly desired constitutional system, the aspirations of *la jeune France* had always received a sympathetic hearing in her salon. She was too intelligent to combat any strongly marked national tendency. Ardent and brilliant young Liberals were no strangers to her, and those who belonged to the new democracy crowded round her with the light of victory in their eyes.

Her chief anxiety was to soften the blow which had been dealt to Chateaubriand. The fall of the legitimate monarchy ended his political career and destroyed the system which he and his friends had worked so hard to establish. Added to this disappointment, he was being perpetually harassed by his creditors—while Ambassador in Rome he had contracted heavy debts.

She wisely attempted to avoid political dis-

cussions at this time, and when these arose in her salon, inevitably—owing to the fact that all shades of opinion were gathered there,—her exquisite tact stilled the waves of controversy. It was said that her pretty phrases were like feathers interposed between the cut and thrust of swords. When asked how she managed to keep the peace at that time, she replied that all her life she had “*fait de l’opposition*.” “But how gently!” a friend objected. “*Non pas, mais j’en faisais un peu à tout le monde*,” was her answer. Speaking of a person whose feelings ran so high that she kept those around her in constant agitation, she remarked, “*Il n’y a que la raison qui ne fatigue pas à la longue*.”

Whilst she sat listening to Chateaubriand’s invective against those who in 1830 had seized the reins of Government—he blamed the *imbécile entourage* of Charles X for having brought about his ruin through their “*peur intrépide*”—she was thinking out a scheme which would distract the genius, and would at least alleviate his financial distress.

During recent years René de Chateaubriand had been engaged in writing his *souvenirs*, with the intention of posthumous publication. She determined that he should give readings of these in her room. The vanity of the author was caressed at the

thought of thus obtaining a foretaste of the judgment of posterity. The experiment succeeded. Once a week a selected company was invited to the lectures. Monsieur Lenormant, married to Juliette's niece, was appointed reader. The audience listened for long hours, without noticeable flagging, to chapters of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.

These evenings came into fashion; invitations to attend them were eagerly sought for. Publishers, hearing of them, vied with each other to buy the manuscript, but the sum the author had in mind was more than they were prepared to give. At length certain friends belonging to his party agreed to pay Chateaubriand a pension during his life, and the publishers who ultimately bought the rights of publication agreed to reimburse them through the profits earned by the book after his death. It was a curious instance of a man selling his life to live upon it.

It was during these evenings that Mary Clarke, living at that time in the Abbaye, became closely associated with Madame Récamier's circle. She listened with rapt attention to the readings, and at times tears gathered in her eyes and ran unchecked down her soft cheeks. Those tears gave more satisfaction to the author than the well-turned tributes of the more competent critics.

The success of the readings made Juliette realise that, to keep her master happy, she must surround him with the important literary figures of the day. New ones were constantly appearing on the horizon. People were talking of an author called Honoré de Balzac. She sent a message urging him to join the group, which already included de Tocqueville, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, Ampère, and others.

Another reason which contributed to the presence of these writers at the Abbaye au Bois was the fact that they all desired to occupy the coveted *fauteuils* of the Académie. Chateaubriand's powerful advocacy influenced the elections; it was worth while to court his good graces and those of his Egeria. More and more her salon took the shape of a literary symposium. Peace reigned in the twilit rooms; the storms of political controversy yielded to the gentle breezes of the discussion of belles-lettres during these receptions, charmingly called "*Les quatre heures*."

But all was not so easy as it looked. Like Madame de Maintenon, who during the last years of Louis XIV's reign complained that her task was to *amuser l'inamusable*, Madame Récamier found that there were days when Chateaubriand, always on the edge of ennui (he admitted that he had yawned

his way through life), grew intractable and morose. The rare occasions when he left her side, to travel, must have brought her her only periods of relaxation. The guardian angels had been wise to attempt to screen her from the scorching furnace of a nature whose egotism was a proverb. She did not conceal all that his friendship cost her. Talking to Loménie in 1841, she admitted that the days at Coppet when the young Prince Augustus of Prussia had declared his passion, rowing her across the calm waters of the Lake of Geneva, and the two first years of her intimacy with Chateaubriand, were the only happiness she had ever known. Although praising him for his nobility and loyalty, she added, "*de véritable sensibilité il n'en a pas l'ombre : il m'a causé plus d'une souffrance.*"

And with how much sensitiveness she herself was dowered ! While smarting from his captious displeasures, his letters written to her from abroad restored her serenity by assuring her of his devotion. "I lay the glories of sunrise at your feet, its rays are gilding the page I send to you"; and from Venice, "I understand Lord Byron wishing to spend long years in this place. Gladly would I end my days here too, if I might be exiled with you."

When he returned to Paris from these voyages, the peacock spread his tail again, and fascinated by

the brilliant colours, she began once more to caress the ruffled feathers. She thought out little fêtes which might distract him and exorcise his sullen moods. Rachel, incomparable tragédienne, was holding Paris spell-bound by her art. Quickly an invitation to the Abbaye au Bois was sent her ; she came there on several occasions to declaim *Esther* and give other readings of her best-known parts. At one of the parties in her honour in 1842, it was admitted that Juliette eclipsed all the lovely women assembled in the salon. Sainte-Beuve wrote that Madame Récamier resigned herself gracefully to the first touch of Time, she kept the beauty of her smile, and her movements were still distinguished by an extreme elegance ; but when a friend complimented her on her looks, she replied, " It's useless for me to deceive myself. From the moment I noticed the little Savoyards in the street no longer turned to look at me, I knew that all was over." But others saw that the matchless charm of grace, the velvety manner—which suggested always a slight shade of doubt—the pureness of that perfect oval face, were unchanged.

Only the glorious eyes of Juliette suffered—those eyes whose glances none could resist. Her sight was failing, cataract had formed, and she was advised

to undergo an operation. Poor Ballanche, distraught with fears for her, fell seriously ill at the time. When she was lying in bed a few days after the ordeal, she heard that his life was despaired of. She got up at once, though the doctors had ordered absolute rest, and hurried to the side of this dear friend. He lived for one week, tenderly nursed by her, but the tears she shed for him, and the risk she had run, prevented the operation from being successful. The faithful friend was buried in the Récamier vault.

The mists of nightfall closed round Juliette, and René de Chateaubriand was entering the Valley of the Shadow. Paralysis had gripped his limbs. He was a prisoner in his chair. Undaunted, he was carried each day to her room. One afternoon, whilst sitting in his accustomed place at her window, he entreated her to marry him. She refused. "Let us change nothing," she said. She did not give him the reason for her refusal, but to a friend she stated it : "If I had thought he would be happier I would have agreed, but the only cheerful moments he has in the day are when he comes to the Abbaye. If I lived with him, this slight excitement, which gives a little variety to his existence, would be lost." But, in her passionate desire to be of greater service to

him, she decided to undergo the operation a second time. Again it failed.

Juliette was blind, and one by one the candles in the *petite église*—the name familiarly given to her group at the Abbaye—were burning out. Both the guardian angels had entered into their rest, Monsieur Récamier, her parents, and how many more! Still she and Chateaubriand kept their trysts. A visitor describes entering her darkened room and being guided by her gentle voice to the chair where he sat immobile, a large screen round him to ward him from the draughts. He lived in dreams now ; a deep melancholy lay across the majestic brow, and silence shrouded his spirit. He spoke only to her. Later he became too infirm to reach her apartments. Then it was Juliette who went to him. A contemporary describes the stark simplicity of the little room where the author lay—the whitewashed walls, the iron bedstead, the crucifix which hung above it. Madame Récamier would come in here with arms outstretched to feel her way to him. In a corner stood a deal case with a broken lock. It contained the manuscript of his souvenirs. The readings of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* were resumed to the few who were admitted here, but in what sad circumstances compared to the earlier ones in her smiling salon.

Outside the shuttered windows, in February 1848, the thunder of guns announced the civil war which lasted till the following June. Did he hear? Like an old oak struck by lightning, splendid in decay, he did not heed them. Juliette, through streets thronged with troops, fenced with barricades defended by the *garde mobile*, forced her way daily to the sick-room. He seemed to recognise those who entered it, but in reality he was indifferent to all. She whispered to his attendants, "How does he look? Does he know me? Did he smile when I came in?" But even for the beloved the lover could smile no more—only the mute appeal of his eyes entreated her not to leave him. During his last days she never did. She spent these in the home of Mary Mohl and her husband, who lived in the same house. On the third day of July he died, and with his death the current of her life dried up.

The following year cholera broke out in Paris. Madame Récamier left the Abbaye to seek shelter in a part of the town where the epidemic was less virulent. She stayed with her niece, Madame Lenormant, in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Three weeks after her removal, she sickened with the dread disease. Her feeble frame could not resist the attack.

She had gone to join him, René de Chateau-

briand. He had written of her, "*Je l'ai suivie, la voyageuse . . . je la devancerai bientôt. . .*" Straying through his Basilica (as he called his *Mémoires*), he hopes she may find the chapel dedicated to her "*il lui plaira peut-être de s'y reposer — j'y ai placé son image.*" The expression which she wore when the sightless eyes were closed assured the mourners that the two had met. Despite the frightful convulsions which had racked her, Death the deliverer restored to Juliette Récamier all the brilliance and serenity of her youth. It was spring-time in her face, for the flowers of spring had never deserted her—her life had been "*un printemps prolongé.*"

After the lecture ended Marion and Luke stood by the door together watching the audience file out of the room. "It's rather splendid that we have netted almost as many this time as last," she said to him. "I thought at least half of them would fall by the way. I'm going to turn them out into the garden now I've offered hostages to fortune, and have tea laid on the terrace. It's so dreadfully hot and stuffy indoors." She looked cool enough herself in her mauve muslin, but the rest of the company appeared congested and perspiring.

"I see you've induced your father to stand by. I wonder how he weathered it?"

"Oh no, I discouraged him from doing so. He only came in a few minutes before the end, and sat at the back of the room beside Father Keogh. I was determined that he should not do more—now honour is satisfied."

"He's making himself very agreeable to the *prima donna*. Look at them!"

Sir Thomas had piloted Madame Grandchose into a shady corner; she was talking to him with animation, her large hands sketching a number of emphatic gestures. There seemed no necessity for Marion to salve him, for every now and then she could hear his easy laugh. The two had evidently struck on some mutually engrossing subject.

"They're getting on like one o'clock—don't attempt to make them break away," said Luke.

He was right, for after she had been given some light refreshment they were seen wandering off in the direction of the rose-garden, pausing now and then to look back at the bright-coloured group of figures camped round the tea-tables.

Marion's spirits rose. It was good to know her father was not bored. She could never rid herself of a sense of responsibility where he was concerned. To distress or depress him was as distasteful to her

as treading on a flower. By this time she knew Madame Grandchose well enough to realise that she would attune herself perfectly to the pitch required, and conversation during their leisurely ramble along the wide grass paths would certainly be free from strain. When they returned she would arrange a short stroll for him with Luke Vaughan—for war-talk—and directly after (at least she hoped so) would come the heartening moments of departure when cordiality is spontaneous from guests and hosts alike.

But it was quite a time before they did return. After they had exhausted the pleasures of the formal garden they wandered further afield, and Marion heard the stable clock strike six. In less than ten minutes she would have to despatch the lecturer to the station. Already Sellars had begun to agitate about her train. Ritual demanded that a clear quarter of an hour should be devoted to a dreary wait on the platform, anything less would constitute a breach of courtesy to the Great Western. Marion put in her usual plea for the departing visitor. "It isn't as if she were driving down in a motor, then of course it would be necessary to allow time for a breakdown," she was saying when the truants returned.

"Would you like me to drive you to the station

in my 'auto' ? I promise there shall be no *panne*," Luke offered.

"No, thank you. I value my life and my hat too highly to risk either, though I would have liked to linger here a little longer. For this time it is good-bye, *n'est-ce pas* ? and that is not a nice word to say. I shall keep happy memories of my afternoons at Foxley. I have no time, I am told, to shake the hands of those who have honoured me by their presence, but I wish to express my thanks to them for their gracious reception." She dropped a little *révérence*, something between a bow and a curtsy. In anyone else the salutation would have been grotesque. Then she linked her arm through Marion's, and with Sir Thomas on one side and Luke Vaughan on the other, she turned her broad hips on the company and descended the stone steps. Hats nodded affably in her direction, and a light murmur of farewell stole like a breeze along the ranks of tea-drinkers as she passed by.

"Shall we take a turn in the garden too ?" Luke asked Marion when they had sped the brougham.

She threw a glance at the neighbours. They were chattering like magpies. Obviously they had no intention of moving at present. It was so pleasant here in the cool syringa-scented air. The shadow of

the tulip tree, growing longer with each moment, was stretching its titanic form almost to their feet.

"I think I can safely ignore them for a few minutes," she said doubtfully, "but I won't go farther than the water garden. We'll go and look at the lilies, and tell the time by them. They must be closing tight, ready for bed, and they were so lovely earlier in the day!"

"Who's that walking with Marion?" Mrs. Webster enquired.

"Captain Vaughan," Father Keogh told her.

"Who?"

The name was repeated by Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Ames, and Mrs. Piercey in chorus.

Everyone looked up.

"I've never met him," the old lady answered in the muted accents of the deaf.

"Perhaps you will later in the summer," Minnie consoled her.

All the women were now watching Marion's long frilled skirt like the trailing blossoms of a wistaria, sweeping the close-shaven lawns on her way to the lily pond.

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X

EACH year as the still, gold-dusted dawns of September returned, Newman registered her unspoken contempt for those who demanded to go a-hunting at six-thirty. Marion assured her that, in order to do this, the loan of an alarum-clock was all that she needed. But the maid, spruce though martyred, was always at her bedside at this hour with a tray of tea as black as ink and as undrinkable.

Marion herself was not sure whether she enjoyed the prelude to the hunting season, though she would not have forgone it. It was pleasant in retrospect, during those indolent hours later when, after her bath and her breakfast, she rested in bed with the yellow blinds drawn down, and the multiple sounds of the day's work reached her through a veil of drowsiness. She felt she had captured something which would otherwise have eluded her in the misty magic of the autumn woods: and the little walk up to the stable-yard with her father, when neither of them spoke, for both seemed to be wrapped in the hush of the morning, was precious. Outside the loose-boxes her father's cheerful voice

calling to the stablemen broke their silence. The hunters were led out into the quadrangle.

“ You’ll ride the young horse, William, I want to see him out; but keep wide of hounds, he might strike out at them. Marion, I’m afraid Comedy is very unfit. I meant to have taken her up earlier, but she’ll be all the better for a morning’s work. We’ll go by Cromacre and the paddocks. I’ve had a hunting gate put on the west side of them, so we shan’t have to go through the village.” As soon as he had mounted he jogged along ahead of her at the hound-pace which she dreaded, for it tired her, but he from long habit could keep it up for hours. It was always a joy to Marion to watch him on a horse, his strong seat and his sensitive hands seemed one with it.

After they had travelled a little way on this particular morning he pulled up to a walk, and they began to ride abreast, talking of all they saw. A covey of partridges, startled from the stubble, flew low across them. The birds were strong on the wing though they skimmed the hedgerows. Her father reined in to watch them disappear.

“ I’ve never seen a bigger covey, all young birds too. Did you count ’em ? We must get some for you for the pot next week, I hadn’t thought they were so forward.” Meadow-pipits filled the next

field. "Queer things those, Marion, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Do you know what they are?" Of course she did, it had been her father's practice to make her bird-conscious ever since she had bumped along by his side on her Dartmoor pony. "They are semi-migratory," he went on. "I expect these arrived here a few days ago from the north—Yorkshire, perhaps. They like to winter where they can get more sun, like people who go to the Riviera."

A farmer's dog was working some sheep out of a root field. They heard his master's thin whistle before they came upon him. The man's drill coat was the same red-brown as the plough. Half of the field had been led, but on the other half the blue-green of the mangold tops, drenched with dew, made a patch of incredibly vivid colour. The peccant flock, escaped from an adjoining pasture, were being rounded up into ever-decreasing circles as the cur-dog raced about them. It was a work of patience; both he and the farmer were taking their time over it, unhurried, following the tempo of Nature. Marion liked the raw sienna of the fleeces, dyed to the hue of the soil. The sheepdog had patches of the same chestnut brown quartering his shaggy flanks.

Every now and again the dog lay low, panting,

watching for the gestures of the worker, listening for his whistle to be repeated, then sprang up to complete his task of bringing up the laggards, bullying the recalcitrants, playing wolf with the more timid. Before they reached the hunting gate he had got them through their hurdles, back to their pastures green, where, scattered wide, they began feeding.

After the riders had left the plantations they could see other horsemen following the road which led from the village ; at first only their heads and shoulders were visible bobbing along the road. Marion recognised old Mr. Standen and his son. The retired brewer was an enthusiastic sportsman.

"I hope there won't be too many out to-day. It's full early to be cutting up the meadows. Keep well to the hedge-sides, Marion, not to damage the aftermath!" (He was still treating her like an ignorant child!)

She did not want a big field either, and she did not want those others to join them. It was a privileged hour, this early one alone with her father.

The light was hardening. The outline of woods and farm buildings sharpened, but the mist still lay as high as their horses' bridles while they remained on the low ground. Cobwebs on the brambles were lit with dew-drops as the sun's rays caught their quiverings, but the traveller's joy

which garlanded the hawthorn was still limp, it would need a whole morning of sun to fluff out the shampooed beards.

Comedy was mad fresh. She was grinding her bit and throwing her head about.

“How does she feel under you?”

Strong as ever, of course, in spite of her summer of idleness in the Arcady of the water-meadows. The movement of her shoulders was elastic and smooth, so was the swagger of her quarters, when Marion could persuade her to walk.

Sir Thomas was watching his young horse. “Canter him up the brow, William,” he called out to his second horseman, “I want to see him move,” and the lad obeyed. “That’s enough; we’ve lots of time; we don’t want to get them sweating.” But sweat they did, all three horses, on this windless day, whilst the sun was climbing steeply behind the straw-ricks on the hill.

“I like the way the ricks are always built against the sky-line, don’t you, Father?”

“I like to see as many as they’ve got this year,” he answered. “I never remember a better harvest, such long straw. I don’t think an acre of ours was laid. They had good luck with their hay too. We’ve much to be thankful for. It should fetch £8 a ton this year, if I’m not mistaken. All forage prices

will be up. Farmers are in for better times, and by God they need 'em." He dropped his reins a moment to light a cigarette. "I was fortunate to get that young horse last year; he'd have cost twice as much if I'd wanted to buy him now. The remount officers are taking all they can lay hands on. War's not a bad friend to the farmer—a slow, dragging war like this (I remember my father telling me that when I was a boy), but it's nobody else's. This will be the last one you'll see, my dear, pray God. A strange way to settle up differences! Man and man can do that in a bout of fisticuffs, but not nations. Though mark my words—these old Boers will live to shake hands with us yet; for it's peace and plenty that bring folks together. When the clean new flesh of prosperity grows over a wound, the hurt is forgotten. Good times make good neighbours. When I was a lad in the 17th Lancers, how we used to long for active service! We feasted on the memory of Balaclava, of the 'Death or Glory' boys. There's more death than glory about this campaign. Is that young Vaughan on a bay pony at the other side of High Coppice?" She had not seen him; she had not the same trained vision as her father. As they topped the rise he rode towards them, and Marion was inexplicably glad.

“Good morning,” she called. “You’ve had a long way to come.”

“Yes, but it’s worth it. It was raining when I left home, but it cleared after I passed Stainton; and just look at it now.” The mist was peeling off the vale like the husk off a fruit. It uncovered field after field of dun stubble, warm plough, and brilliant pasture, cut by the dark, dissecting lines of hedges. A carpet of fawn and brown and green was spread below them in the valley.

They pulled up to wait for hounds; they were going to draw here. A bar of light in the eastern sky grew ever more golden. Seven or eight riders had already arrived, others came trotting up the slope. It was a few minutes before the hunt servants’ coats made vermilion splashes in the near landscape. The crack of their whips seemed to Marion of the same colour—scarlet translated into sound. The huntsman put hounds in on the far side. Those outside listened to the crashing of branches, and the note of his horn. “It’s a lovely mellow sound, full and ripe as stacked corn,” she thought to herself, waiting for hounds to speak; then their music thrilled, and the voices of men woke the dark places of the wood. Dear time-honoured names of hounds were being called—Rambler, Rover, Jester, Steadfast—and a moment later the

pied loveliness of the pack deployed itself across the open.

They ran for ten minutes before they rolled the cub over, and Marion, hot and breathless (she was no more fit than Comedy), pulled up in the corner of a fallow field. The mare was reaching at her bridle, and her rider's arms were aching.

"It's frightfully blind," said her father when he rode up to her. "If we don't get some frost soon, there'll be some nasty tosses when hunting begins. How did Comedy jump those sheep-hurdles in the bottom?"

She had leaped them like a stag, Marion told him: and now the hunter was looking for more to jump; with her full brown eyes wild with re-discovered joys she was waiting eagerly for the further movement of hounds. A farmer's child on a woolly Shetland was standing in their midst to get blooded. The brush was handed to him, and he was led away, his tam-o'-shanter all awry, and a bright streak of red down one pale smiling cheek.

"D'you remember that being done to you, Pussy?" Her father enquired. Yes, of course she did; she remembered all that he had done for her, remembered and cherished everything.

Luke Vaughan's back was turned to her: he was talking to old Standen—she wished he would ride

beside her. Their conversation drifted to her—Ventersdorp, Sanna's Post, Kronje, pom-poms. It was all South Africa, unending war-talk; she didn't want to hear it. She wanted to ask him if he was watching the shadows of the ragged clouds, and the figure of a man walking towards the wood with a sack on his back and a gun under his arm. Against the light he looked as if he were cut out of lead, like the tin soldiers of her childhood when all their gay paint had worn off. But the barrels of his gun gleamed bright. He carried it with easy nonchalance. Adorable, that unstressed grace, that at-home-ness with the well-worn butt and shining barrels; the gun under his arm was just another of his limbs, no more cumbersome to him than his hands or his feet. What had he got in the sack which gave him that hobgoblin look? Ferrets probably. She pictured them, muzzled and writhing in its dark depths. Was Luke Vaughan enjoying the scent of the blackberries which stole across from where they grew rank and abundant around the chain-harrow left behind the gate, ready for the spring?

The hunters were shaking themselves; white steam was rising from their dripping quarters. "We're going to draw Steeple Hill next. We must keep out of the vale; we don't want to cut up the

good grass," somebody said. It was high, poor pasture where they were standing. The huntsmen were remounting. Her father had gone off to examine his young horse.

"I want to have a feel of him, William," he said. After he had thrown his leg across the saddle he left Marion, to ride beside the huntsman. Lee was telling him about a puppy-show, and their own young entry.

Vaughan came up to Marion. "I never thought I'd see you to-day," she said. "I imagined you were still too sick for anything so strenuous."

"I think I should be able to get off my death-bed for a day's hunting—or even cubbing. As a matter of fact I'm as strong as a lion. I've come on stones since I last saw you. I had my Board last week, and I shall be taking a draft out about the 10th. . . ."

Had the sun gone in, or was it his words which made her feel so chill, suddenly?

"I'm awfully glad," was what she said.

"I'm worried, though," he continued, "about sailing so soon. I never thought I should. Before I leave I want to ask you something." He was not looking at her.

Comedy was still fresh, in spite of her gallop. It seemed impossible to make her walk, she was on

her toes, nagging at her bridle, and throwing flakes of foam from it. Marion bent forward to pat her on the shoulder and speak to her. She felt her heart beating as it had not done when she pulled up after that gallop from High Coppice.

"You must tell me at once if you're vexed at what I'm going to say. I didn't like to ask before. I did not know you well enough, and I thought I should be here much longer."

If only Comedy were not so tiresome, sidling and fractious! Marion could not keep her head straight, riding down this track, deep-rutted with the wheels of farm waggons. The horses' hoofs were cutting to ribbons the sweet grass of the bridle-path.

"It's hell to be going out again, leaving all this behind." But he was looking at hounds, they were making a wide detour of the field, sterns waving gaily. Her father was still jogging along by the huntsman.

"I want to leave something with you—you mustn't agree to it, if it's the least bit of a nuisance."

"Steady, Comedy, you idiot." Marion was not going to answer and she determined not to meet his eyes, though she knew that they were turned on her now.

"Your snaffle is twisted in the ring of your

martingale, let me straighten it out." He leaned forward and his hand brushed hers, but he did not remove it from her rein after he had done so. For a minute they rode in silence. Both horses were playing with their bits.

"You see, my dear, it's frightfully awkward to ask, as I know that you are more than likely to refuse. Why should you say yes? But I shall understand whatever answer you give." The two horses were so close that he ran his hand down the plaited mane of Comedy, tenderly, as a man caresses the head of a child. Marion was listening to him with a strange sense of detachment. Were these words being addressed to her? If she uttered one herself she might check them and the spell would break. "I shall feel better when I've said my say . . . it's this . . . this polo pony is the best I've got—a smasher, and he's a good hunter too, well up to your weight. Would it be possible for you to keep him at Foxley this season? Of course I'd pay the forage bill. But I'd like you to ride him. You may have lamed some of your horses by Christmas, one usually does, and he'd carry you at the tail of hounds for half a day."

Comedy had settled down at last, Marion was a quiet rider, and they got on well together. Her voice was quite level when she answered him.

“ That won’t be necessary. We shan’t expect you to pay for forage. I’d love your pony to stand in our stables. Did you play him in the Inter-Regimental ? I think I remember the white hairs in his tail—Father says that’s always the sign of a good one. . . . I’ll keep him as long as you like.”

They had reached Steeple Hill, where they found almost immediately. Marion did not speak to Vaughan again till hounds were just going home, and then it was to say good-bye. She explained to her father what he had proposed.

“ That’s capital; I’m delighted. We’ll see him at Foxley before he sails ; you might ask him to come over for a night. You look a little tired and white, Marion—has it been too much for you ? Shall I just ask that nice young chap to stay with us on Friday night ? It would be handy for him. They are meeting at the cross-roads the next day.”

“ No, darling—that wouldn’t be much use. You see, he’s sure to be frightfully busy as he’s leaving so soon.”

“ Well, you mustn’t overtire yourself cubbing. I think Comedy *is* a little strong for you, so early in the season. Why not ride my hack for a bit or that pony of Vaughan’s when he sends it over ? I don’t like your looking seedy. If you aren’t absolutely fit I shan’t go to Doncaster—though I should have

liked to attend the sales," he added, wistful as a child. "There won't be as much competition there as in normal years."

He was right, this was no normal year. It was, or rather it had been, "*annus mirabilis*," till to-day.

When she got back to the house she told Newman she would rest till luncheon. Her head was aching; that was often the way after the first morning's hunt. She had not been riding for several months.

At first she tried to read, then she laid down her book. A peacock butterfly was fretting on the window, trying to force its way out through the leaded panes. Silly butterfly! She thought of it as a leaf struggling to detach itself from a branch. "I shall be sailing in ten days or so," he had said. What were ten days?

Sleep began to steal over her. The butterfly's wings were marked with an Argus eye (the peacock is the symbol of eternity). Ten days indeed! Its wings were like brown sails. She had seen butterflies fly over the edge of a chalk cliff and stretch themselves across blue ocean. She wondered how long so perilous a flight could last.

XI

SIR THOMAS VERLANDER came home with a chill. Marion recognised, as soon as he entered the room, that he was out of sorts. He was uncommunicative and a little surly. The weather had been atrocious, he said; all the favourites had gone down, and the sales had been disappointing. He had been away less than a week, but he was unreasonably irritated at finding that orders given before he left home were not yet completed. He grumbled at the dilatory ways of the estate men and at the slackness of his agent. "I expected to find all that *done*," he repeated several times whilst Marion was attempting to soothe him. How well she sympathised with his impatience, for she herself always imagined an ardent gang of brownies taking over the tasks imposed and completing them with supernatural agility whilst her back was turned.

"But, Father, you only left on Monday—it will be *ages* before the new fencing is up." He grunted. "As to the topiary, they're hard at it. I hear the shears snapping all day like the beak of a stork, but the maze takes three weeks to clip. No, darling, we

haven't had a reply yet from the man who is considering Coppice Farm, he has to look over the land again. You can't hurry a prospective tenant. Will you have a whisky and soda? You look perished." But he would not, saying he would wait till dinner.

He ate nothing. After they left the dining-room she proposed a game of chess in her boudoir—it would be easier to cajole him to bed if they were sitting upstairs—but he answered rather shortly that he had letters to write. He would have his reading-lamp carried into the Deed Room.

"But the Deed Room is icy! I'll have a fire lit there at once, it's always colder than any other room in the house, as it gets no sun." He ridiculed her for being fussy, and wandered off, leaving her disturbed and resourceless in the saloon. For a while she too sat down to write, but she was ill at ease, for she had heard him coughing in the corridor. He had never been ill, but he admitted to-night to having a headache, and she had read in the newspapers of an epidemic of influenza.

She decided not to leave him too long in that chilly room, poring over musty documents and perusing ledgers from the estate office; she would give him till ten, no longer. She waited till the last chime of the grandfather clock in the outer hall

had died away. It had a pretty, silvery tone in contrast to its tall stature and dark frame. Then she prepared to join her father, pondering over an excuse for interrupting him.

When she first entered the room it appeared unoccupied, then she caught sight of him. He had been screened from her by a high lacquer cabinet. He was on one knee, sorting and examining a mass of papers and parchments which he had taken out of it. Boxes containing others, some open, some emptied, stood all round him. The floor was littered with them.

“ You’re having a field-day ! Are you looking for any particular paper ? ”

“ No, dear, no. Just refreshing my memory—living backwards—I rather enjoy it. Living with the dead—but I suppose we shall all do that some day ; I hope so, anyway. When you came in I was with my old grandfather—as close to him as I am to you. I’ve been looking at his letters and journals.” He put them into her hands, rose from his knees and sat down heavily in a chair by the fire.

“ They make good reading. What is it the Bible says ? ‘ He being dead yet speaketh.’ ”

She held the yellowed letters tenderly, laying the diaries in her lap. She looked closely at their writing ; faint though the ink was it stood out on the

ivory ground as delicate and pointed as fine lace.

“ They knew how to express themselves in those days, didn’t they ? Nothing slipshod about their thoughts or words. Those you have now are dated 1827. Can you read them ? One has to go slow, it takes time to decipher them . . . but everything went more slowly then, more slowly and more graciously. Folks were made of different, closer-woven stuff. They were content with simple joys, absorbed in family and estate. Here is what the old gentleman writes—here’s one of his letters. He’s the chap in the blue coat and buff smallclothes whose portrait hangs over the mantelpiece in the outer hall. He was evidently very proud of his eldest son (my father) when he went up to Brasenose with his brother. Their mother’s letters are here too—such tender homilies. She was worrying, as mothers do now, about their work at Oxford, wondering whether they were doing any. I don’t suppose they were, the young villains.” He chuckled. Marion’s eyes were travelling painstakingly along the close-written, criss-crossed sheets. In a few minutes she became absorbed, and did not listen to her father’s words. She had happened on an earlier letter which announced the birth of a son and heir :

“ I rejoice to inform you that Caroline was

delivered of a son this morning at eight-thirty. She is, I am glad to say, in excellent spirits, so is the dark-headed little rascal at her side. It is our fond hope that he may, my dear Father, be worthy of you, and of Foxley—that he will follow in your steps and devote his time and energies as you have done to the care of his property and the needs of his tenantry. In the words of the Catechism, do his duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call him. The apothecary assures me that Caroline and the young Thomas—aged twelve hours—are in good case. I therefore trust I shall be able to join you on Friday. I shall travel by the Rockingham, and change at Grantham to the Union, and if the roads are tolerable, I should reach Reading by twelve noon. I shall be obliged if you will send my horse to meet the stage. Caroline desires that she should be kindly remembered to you, and the little lad sends my mother a kiss.”

“The little Thomas—how charming!” Marion said, folding the letter carefully back into its deep brittle creases when she had finished reading.

“Yes, the little Thomas—that was my father. I reckon they must have been happy at Foxley the

day they broke the seal on that letter. He certainly fulfilled their expectations of him. He was the thirteenth Thomas Verlander to live and die here—the finest-tempered man I ever knew, and the most just. I wanted to call you Thomasina when you were born, but my dear Margaret wouldn't have it : she said it was an ugly name, and so it is, I suppose . . . and then we always hoped. . . .”

“ I know, darling, you always hoped for a son. I'm so sorry I was a mistake !”

“ Not that, but it seems strange there isn't a Tom Verlander to take over when I am gone . . . strange and hard.”

“ Of course it is.”

“ Not hard for me so much as for you. It's difficult for a woman to be left with great responsibilities. I could have wished you had someone beside you, but I'm right glad there's no entail—that's a comfort to me. I was beginning to worry. I was just glancing at the deeds—to make sure. We won't mention it any more, but put the old letters back where they belong.”

They could not do it. As with pious hands they folded and docketed and tied the faded records, Marion and her father were loth to replace them unread, it would have meant turning deaf ears to voices which could reach them still. So they sat on,

he beside his green-shaded reading-lamp, she curled up on the hearth-rug, relying on the light from the wood fire which she fed continually with white-skinned birch logs. Each took a turn at reading, and the gentle chronicles seemed to re-people the house with the bodily presence of their writers. Lady Verlander described the rapture with which she was awaiting the return of her sons from Harrow—all Foxley, she wrote, was agog. The keeper had bred two promising young greyhounds, there were plenty of snipe in the low pastures, a frost had brought the woodcock in. Pheasants were numerous this year. They had bought a new pony for Richard. Tom's horse was still fat, but he would soon get fit.

Sir Thomas reported his activities as *Custos Rotulorum*—he had spent the previous week at Quarter Sessions, but he had also purchased shawls and fans for the “dear girls” and their mother, when he last went to town. The marriages and births and deaths of friends were recorded, the quarrels of neighbours, the illnesses of retainers. The procession of the seasons in the diaries was faithfully observed, as they clothed Foxley with the purple of summer, or with the fine white raiment of winter.

There were constant allusions to the work on the

land, the sowing and reaping of well-known fields and their good husbandry : the planting of young trees which had now grown into spreading timber was recorded. Naïve comments were entered on the increased cost of living and of maintenance, predictions of hard times ahead, but through them all, like beads strung on a silver thread, ran an implicit faith in Providence and its unfailing mercy.

“ I seem to feel their hands on my shoulder, Marion, don’t you ? Hands of encouragement and blessing. But, my dear, I somehow think that we are near the end of the chapter, *that* life seems so far away from us now. I’m no prophet, but I have learned to read the weather. There’s no more red sky at evening, no shepherd’s delight. It’s a threatening dawn we see each day. You say I’m a pessimist—well, I hope I am. What I am watching is the change in the heart of man—not the altered conditions of his life, those must change, like the fashion. We’ve discarded perruques and paniers, but by gad ! they clothed grander human beings than the race of to-day. How is it going to battle with the storms when they come ? ”

“ There have always been storms, Daddy, and ships that will ride them.”

“ That’s true. But do we know our bearings ? ”

There are so many rocks ahead."

"The rocks were always there. We have known how to avoid them."

"With good seamanship and steering by the stars, but to-day it seems as if we'd lost sight of those."

She had not heard him talk like this before, and she looked at him curiously. He leaned his head on the back of his chair, and she could study the fine profile, clean-cut as an intaglio, for his eyes were turned away from hers, as if they were searching in the fire for signs and wonders. The tongues of fire were leaping upwards, licking the seventeenth-century fire-back, searing the rude bas-relief of the coat of arms, as if they had no more use for such designs and were seeking to obliterate and destroy.

"When I read these"—he laid his hand heavily on a bundle—"I feel some of us have lived too long in Eden. Perhaps the angels have come to throw us out. We've got to experience a new earth before we reach the old heaven."

She smiled. She wanted to change his mood, above all things she wanted him to go to bed, for he was flushed, and there were dark shadows round his eyes.

"In the new order of things I know your sex

will occupy another place. I don't see how it's going to work out. I like to think of women as my mother and grandmother were ; in the years to come they'll not be like that. They'll wish to lead, and dominate, and grasp ; they'll do it too. It won't hurt 'em, but the men will have to suffer. It won't be all gain to them either, they'll lose as much as they win—virtue will go out of them (I don't mean that in the moral sense). I shan't live to see the day, but I can see at least the dawn of a false freedom. When things go badly, when people begin to sigh for all that's gone, you can quote your old father—tell them that the times are out of joint because woman has abdicated from the kingdom of home. After she has left it cold and bare, civilisation will creep out of the door she left ajar—that's my opinion anyway.”

Marion had got up, and stood patiently waiting for him to rise. He did so reluctantly. It had grown warm by the hearth, he felt disinclined to quit his chair, but midnight had struck. She lit the two silver bedroom candles and turned the lamp down, bending over it to blow out the last flicker. When he had followed her down the long stone-paved corridor, she turned to ask him if he still felt shivery. He shook his head, and indeed his hands were hot when she touched them. Was he feverish, she

wondered ? Instead of parting from him on the landing she went to his door and opened it. As usual in his room the curtains were undrawn. Standing by the wide-open windows she could hear the rustle of leaves in the dry autumn air. They had begun to fall fast during the last few days, the little pale things were spinning giddily through the darkness.

“ I’ll close these a bit for you. The air’s so chilly . . . and shall I come back to tuck you up, and bring you a hot toddy ? ”

“ No, thanks, I don’t need one.”

“ Then let me give you some phenacetin.”

But this too he refused. He was asleep when she stole back into the room half an hour later. Carefully shading the light she carried, she went up to his bed ; he was breathing too rapidly. His Bible was lying on the coverlet, he had evidently been too weary to replace it on the table at his bedside. The marker he always used dangled its tag of red ribbon from between the pages. She had made it for him—painfully, with much finger-pricking—when she was nine years old. She opened the book at the place : in Genesis. He had scored a verse with his pencil : “ So he drove out the man ; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep

the way of the tree of life," were the last lines of his evening chapter.

She looked round the room. How eloquently it spoke of him in the pile of sporting magazines heaped on the bureau, the neatly ranged row of well-cleaned riding-boots, the hunting-horns shining like gold on the mantelpiece. A homespun suit lay folded on the sofa ready for the morning, his shirt and braces were hanging on a chair, ties and bandanna handkerchiefs were ranged on the dressing-table. She looked at all, tenderly, and at her father's diary which lay open on the writing-table. "Returned Foxley. An east wind, but no frost yet, I regret to say, for the country is very blind. Train late owing to fog, did not get to the house till seven o'clock. Hounds met at Torbourne to-day, and had a good morning's cubbing. I was sorry not to have been out with them, but one can't do everything. Found letters from Kilmayne and Elliot awaiting me. I sent a note to Father Keogh asking him to call to-morrow for the £50 I promised him for dear Margaret's chapel. Epsom reports that the horses are all well. So, I am glad to say, is my Marion."

His Marion—she was that if nothing more. As she glanced at the closed eyelids and lightly parted lips she seemed to see him helpless as a baby, no

older than "the dark-headed rascal" at Caroline's side, and at the same instant she felt a child herself, cradled on his knee. What mattered it that all should end with her? That no further seed should ripen?

But after she reached her own room and lay in a cave of darkness under the carved canopy of her bed, she thought she heard the voices of that cloud of witnesses entreating her, those who had testified to-night to their enduring love of family and home. "The torch is in your hands, guard the flame jealously, breathe on it low."

Just before waking, she dreamed she was caressing the soft hands of an infant. She heard a knock. "Hush, you will rouse him." Who? Newman had come in, rattling the curtain-rings harshly as she drew them back.

"Sir Thomas didn't sleep well, Miss. His cough was very troublesome, he told Mr. Sellars."

Marion left her bed hastily to throw on a dressing-gown.

"He's done far too much lately. I knew it."

A cold mist was leaning against the windows. The trees, drained of all colour, stood sentinel above fields white with heavy dew, dotted with the phantom forms of cattle.

“It’s very autumnal to-day,” Newman droned on, “so cold and raw that I don’t think Sir Thomas should leave the house. Mr. Sellars says he wasn’t himself when he got home last night.”

And the house itself, in spite of roaring fires, had the same chill air when she went downstairs.

XII

“ YOU’VE got a touch of pneumonia, I’m afraid.”

“ Touch of fiddlesticks,” growled Sir Thomas. He shook his head at Dr. Fraser, who was fitting his stethoscope back into his breast-pocket. “ Ring for Sellars, I’ll have my bath at once, Marion.”

“ You mustn’t get up to-day ; we’ve got to keep you in bed for a while.”

“ Nonsense, Fraser ! I’ve not spent a day in bed since I broke my leg hunting with the Hurworth in ’87.”

“ I can’t help that, I’m not going to let you get up now ; you’ve got to obey my orders like anybody else. Miss Marion and I will discuss matters ; we won’t want to bother you any further.”

They left him, with Sellars hovering in the passage. The doctor went downstairs to write his prescriptions.

“ Is he bad ? ” Marion asked, with fear clipping her words.

“ It’s localised at present, just a patch on the right lung. Can you and his servant manage, or shall I wire to London for a nurse ? ” They decided

to wait twenty-four hours and to make shift with the village one. "He hates strangers. I think he would be more difficult with someone he doesn't know." But next day they had to telegraph for two.

He had certainly caught a chill racing. It had been cold all the week. Marion explained that he had looked unwell when he returned from the meeting, but could not be persuaded to take any care of himself on Saturday, refusing to see the doctor till this morning, and even now under protest.

Foxley wore a new face, an anxious careworn air. How quickly a place may change from a house into a hospital ! Outside his door stood a table on which the trays of barley water and jelly rested, in his dressing-room a bright fire burned with a kettle on the trivet, the nurses flapped their white head-dresses above spirit-lamps, whilst Marion sat in the invalid's room listening to the husky voice, interrupted with the sharp, painful coughs which shook him.

"How is he now, Sister ?" Marion asked unceasingly ; and the answer was always non-committal. But the questions she asked, frequent and anxious as they were, were as nothing in number to the questions her father asked her.

"Where's Briggs ? What's he done about the

re-roofing of the barn on Throstle's Nest Farm? Are they plastering the two cottages opposite the Church? Have you seen Mike to-day, I want to know if that yearling is sound again? He must have knocked himself galloping in the paddock—or else it's the damned hard ground that has done it. Raining again, is it? Thank God for that. I've never known such going—like asphalt. We need rain badly, lots of it—I should like to see it rain for a fortnight. It's been a shocking drought—hard on the young trees too. I shouldn't be surprised if it has killed a number in the new plantation, but this rain may save them."

What was going to save him? Dr. Fraser came every few hours. "If we can keep him quiet . . . if we can get him to sleep. . . ." The febrile condition allowed him no rest, it was wearing him out. The pneumonia spread to the other lung, and on the fourth day its poison clouded the brain. The rambling talk grew ever more disjointed as the physical restlessness increased.

Marion came in, after lying down for an hour, to find him sitting in an arm-chair by the fire.

"I can't stay in bed, my dear, I've far too much to do. Besides," he added mysteriously, "it's Margaret's bed and I mustn't disturb her. She's lying there quietly—she's dreaming of Ireland—"

he chuckled, " she's homesick for Killarney. Funny thing, Marion, but your dear mother never grew accustomed to this country—that's why she left us, you and me. If you make a sound you'll wake her, and she'll steal away when we're not looking, won't she, Sister ? "

The nurse, distraught, attempted to get him into the bed in the dressing-room next door, but in vain. When she and Marion tried to lead him from his chair, he shook them off angrily.

" Let me be, you . . . you kind foolish women. I know my own business. I'm here to watch over Margaret—Margaret McGrath, my wife. She died twenty years ago—of diphtheria. But she's sleeping just now. I brought her here when she was a slip of a girl, with the bluest eyes in the world, and I'm waiting for her to open them."

Dr. Fraser could do nothing with him either, he was afraid to give narcotics lest they should increase the difficulty in breathing. On Friday he wired for a specialist and a third nurse, for on that morning they had been unable to restrain him from opening his door and wandering out into the passage. He stood on the landing irresolute, then, grasping the banisters, slowly began to descend the stairs, pausing at each step to look around him, as if the scene were unfamiliar, raising his bewildered

eyes to the portraits which hung on the panelled walls.

“There’s that chap Tom Verlander—a crony of the Merry Monarch’s—the black sheep of our family. He made love to every man’s wife, and gambled half his fortune away. And yonder is poor Marion, his daughter. They are both by Kneller. She never married, poor lass. I’ve got a Marion too—Pussy, her mother calls her. The other Marion lived and died at Foxley—well, it’s not a bad place, I’ve never wanted to leave it, but my wife did. She pined to go back to Ireland. . . . You can’t beat the Irish paddocks, Doctor, for blood-stock—nothing like ’em ! It isn’t only the limestone soil—it’s the climate, the wind and the rain, that’s what she used to say. It’s a quotation (from Shakespeare, I think). Anybody in the drawing-room ? I’ll just peep in. It’s where she used to sit with her baby on her knee. Open the door, my girl, we’ll look for her.”

The sun was breaking through the south windows. After the shadowy stairway it appeared brilliantly light. Marion, standing behind him, saw his dazed glance embrace the empty room. Nurse persuaded him to sit down, his laboured breathing alarmed her. Finally with much cajoling they got the sick man back to bed, but not before he had visited the library.

"You see, I'm looking for Maggie, my wife. You knew her? I've not spoken of her much these last few years . . . it was a bad business. . . ." He shook his head.

"This is the library," he announced pompously, using the formula with which he introduced visitors to the long, palely gleaming walls. "These books were all collected by my great-grandfather—a bibliophile—at the end of the eighteenth century. I've never read one of 'em.

*'His only books were woman's looks,
And folly all they taught him.'*

Do you know those lines, Fraser? I hope they don't apply to you. Well, personally, I've always preferred fillies, and I've got two smashers running out now in the Long Paddock, behind Foxley Grove. They're by Galopin—both entered in the Oaks."

That gave the doctor an idea.

"Why don't you go back to bed, and we'll get your stud groom to come down and have a chat with you?"

After that he allowed himself to be guided, quiet as a lamb, back to his room and his four-poster, and lay in it exhausted till the shadows grew long. When the specialist arrived he could only deal in platitudes: it depended on the heart, and Sir Thomas

was not a young man, though so far the pulse was surprisingly strong. All depended on the crisis.

For Marion each hour was a crisis.

After half an hour's consultation the pundit drove back to the station through the violet dusk, but the sleeping draught he had prescribed was successful. When Marion saw her father drowsy and relaxed a great hope invaded her soul. She was able to sit down and answer some of the innumerable enquiries which had come by letter and telegram. To Aunt Kitty she wrote, "He is holding his own. We must *will* him to get through the next few days. I will expect you to-morrow, but no one is allowed to see him at present."

That night she too slept. One of the nurses promised to call her if the restlessness returned. She slept the heavy-as-clay sleep which comes from long watching or deep grief. At seven the light woke her—an oblique ray pierced her weighted eyelids painfully. She crept to the room where Nurse was watching. She had been dozing, judging by her stiff face and strangled voice.

"What news?"

"He's done pretty well, had some good long naps, and taken all I've given him. The breathing is easier."

"Pulse less rapid?" Nurse nodded.

Marion tiptoed to the communicating door. She could see her father's face clearly from where she stood. How immaculate he looked. It was characteristic of him, that fastidious tidiness. His hands, palm uppermost, lay outside the unruffled sheets in a gesture of surrender. It was good to see all tenseness gone and the nervous limbs relaxed. She had to restrain herself not to speak, so great was her joy.

"You're sure the pulse *is* strong? Have you just taken it?" He stirred and coughed. Something in the distressed breathing made her thoughts travel back to the mill. It was as if life here too were struggling to finish the appointed circuit; like the old wheel it was attempting to complete its revolution. She remembered Briggs' words: "Fasten him in, he'll keep at it all right."

She visualised the drops which fell that day from the blades, little pear-shaped diamonds gathered from the pool below. They were of the same purity as her father's words and deeds—unsullied, crystalline.

"He's seventy-three," Marion whispered. "Is that a great age?"

"Not nowadays," Nurse answered. Then the expectation of life had increased, thank God for that! But her father did not belong to nowadays. He was of another century.

She sat all morning in his room whilst he roused from sleep to smile, and from smiling drifted back to sleep. The bell announcing the workmen's dinner-hour startled her, time had gone so quickly.

*“ Ding dong bell
Pussy's in the well. . . ”*

Her mother had repeated that nursery rhyme to her when, as a baby, this clamorous peal had scared her. . . . The picture of the mill again—the mill and its wheel.

She went out on to the terrace to find a few flowers for the sick-room. The gardeners on their way to their cottages and bothy enquired, “ How's the Squire to-day? Is he mending? ” Their anxious faces told her that they knew her fear—but Aunt Kitty had learned it from the doctor. Since her arrival she, poor soul, had never stopped sniffing. She was like a sponge that cannot be wrung out, however hard one tries to twist it.

Marion herself was tearless. She realised that nothing now could hinder or prevent her father's journey. She was only a spectator standing in the harbour, waiting for the sails to fill, and he was returning to the morning-land of love, for now he spoke only of her mother. When the dew is on the ground and the sun is in the East, the imprints on

the grass are of the feet of two : man and woman, as in the Garden.

Father Keogh called morning and evening to enquire. The old priest served two churches, the little chapel in Foxley grounds built at the bequest of Lady Verlander, and St. Joseph's in the town. A tentative hesitancy hedged his words, as if he were afraid lest they should bruise, but on occasions Marion had heard him strong and eloquent in the pulpit. Then his fragile hands, whose gestures in the Mass were like the folding and unfolding of angels' wings, seemed to become as those of an artisan, dexterous and powerful, who is driving in the piles of a structure.

Father Keogh did not express sorrow when he heard that Sir Thomas was not expected to recover. They had been good friends, but he was himself already *de plein pied* in Paradise.

"You see, dear child," he said to Marion, with his vacillating glance wandering childishly over the landscape, "we do wrong to hold souls back—to tug at them. We should make a free-will offering. I have always felt that when the time came, your father would wish us to act generously, as he ever did—no stint, no grudging, no regrets. I know you can't give him up at present, but you will draw upon the inexhaustible resources of the soul later."

Every evening he came to tell her of the Masses which were being said. "I won't bother you by coming in to-morrow morning, but I shall be walking through the gardens at ten, and I will wait for a few minutes under your father's windows. If you can remember, will you come to them? Then I shall know. Good-night to you . . . and a good night to him."

He trotted off, a little black figure against the sunset, like a rook going to his wind-rocked nest. . . .

It had been raining for a fortnight as the Squire of Foxley had wished. Then the weather "took up" for twenty-four hours. The soft aspersions of autumn had not dashed the hedgerows, and had greened the fields miraculously. The rhododendrons looked freshly varnished. The pale gold of the deciduous trees shivered lightly, as if to recover from their douches; though the chestnuts already lifted stripped branches black and stiff to the rain-washed sky.

Several estate men stopped the priest to ask for news. Mike's wife intercepted him at the chapel door. She and her husband had come over from Ireland with Lady Verlander when she married.

"Miss Marion sent for Mike the day before

yesterday. Sir Thomas often had him down at the house, if he were too busy to walk up to the stables. I've not heard how he is this morning."

For a while they walked together in silence. Then Father Keogh took the path which led to the terraces. He could see the stables on his left, built round four sides of a stone-flagged court. A giant walnut tree stood in the centre, and below it the moss-covered mounting-block. Down the garden steps he hurried, laying his hand on the balustrade—they were slippery from the rains. Each flight was crowned by a carved stone vase filled with agapanthus, the blue lilies as classic in form as the urns which held them. When he drew nearer to the house his heart beat fast. The question of Gehazi was on his lips, but before he reached a sheltered corner of the Italian garden the answer came to him. "It is well."

He read his Breviary inattentively as he paced to and fro below the window. He had to wait for some time before Marion came. She did not speak, her eyes were calm. After a few seconds he replaced his shabby hat, and went back to the Presbytery.

Many waylaid him on his journey home, and asked for tidings. To each he gave the same reply. "I've just come from Foxley . . . he's gone, God

rest his soul," but he would have liked to say "Sir Thomas has arrived."

"And so he asked for old Mike—or was it you who sent for him?" It was the same evening, and he was sitting on the sofa beside Marion.

"He mentioned his name many times in his ramblings, but actually, when he stood by the bed, I don't know if Father recognised him. But Mike was wonderful, it was as if he were rocking a cradle. He talked of the days when Father was stationed at Cahir, and rode hard and straight with the Duhallow, and one day Father asked him if he had seen Miss Margaret McGrath (for he was already courting Mother at the time)—'Had she gone well in that gallop?' And old Mike—he was young Mike then—held up his hands in an ecstasy and cried out, 'Ornamental palings, Capting, she jumped them clean as milk.' It was of Ireland that he talked, not much of Foxley. I think Mike holds it always before his eyes, as Mother did, and as we hear the song of birds without listening to them. . . . I don't know exactly the moment when his breathing stopped—it must have been about nine o'clock. His mind seemed quite clear then, but he had no wish to come back amongst us. . . . Don't you know that feeling one has when one wakes out

L A T E S U M M E R

of sleep, and doesn't wish to break the thread? With gentle handling it will hold. He was winding the golden strands of eternity around him. . . . And Mike went on . . . the story continued."

"The story will continue," said the priest.

XIII

IF only Aunt Kitty would keep still ! She mooned from room to room, stopping before one table or another, picking up first one object, then its neighbour. Marion would have liked to attach a label to each, " You are requested not to touch the exhibits." That close scrutiny, those restless fingers, and the running commentary, exasperated her.

" The Crown Derby perfume-burners are very valuable ; I remember my mother telling me so. The snuff-boxes are far too good to leave lying about—they should be in a *vitrine*. When I was a girl the miniatures were kept in the Spanish cabinet at the end of the saloon ; the sun here will fade them dreadfully. Your father had them put into that frame on the wall ? " She fixed her eyeglass firmly, it raised one eyebrow comically as she screwed it into position. " Yes, just what I thought, the Cosways are already much less brilliant. I don't see the Englehart—it's not been lost, I hope . . . ? Oh dear ! I see one of the large Oriental vases has a chip—housemaids of course ! They're fiends."

She moved to the door. " By the way, dear, I

would like to have a look at the Folios. What wonderful prices they fetch now. Extraordinary that musty old Shakespeares can realise such sums." From the library came a startled cry a moment later. "Where is the First Folio, I can't see it anywhere?"

Marion was obliged to follow her aunt, to reassure. "The books are where they have always been." There was no respite.

"Do you know what the library is worth? I've often wondered. Things are going up every day. I expect the probate valuation will give us some idea. Wicked these death duties, and the more remote the succession the heavier they are. You'll have to find a lot of money and your successor still more. What will you sell—land? Of course some of the outlying farms could be disposed of, all the rest of the estate is in a ring fence. Or will you sell books? The Psalter perhaps? There won't be anything left, and nothing to leave if this daylight robbery goes on. Fancy Sir William Harcourt imposing it! Now if it had been one of the professional Liberal politicians it would have been more comprehensible. John Morley, or that pro-Boer Campbell-Bannerman—but from a man who belongs to the landed classes! . . . What are the duties now? The country won't stand it for long—why should they submit to

spoliation? Now, dear, I think I'll go and find John; I said I'd meet him in the stables. Will you come too?"

Marion shook her head. She was expecting Mr. Baxter and had ordered tea at four-thirty. She stood at the window watching the sturdy figure stump through the garden, pausing every now and then to throw an appraising glance around.

Foxley already seemed to have passed out of Marion's keeping. She thought when her father died that she would be the custodian of the precious jewel. But in the cold mist of affliction she was being parted from her treasure. Strangers were claiming it, alien hands reached out for it. Whom did it belong to? Those black-coated inquisitors from Somerset House, and poor gauche Johnnie. House and land cried in vain to her, "Defend us, keep us"; others had taken possession, thieves had broken in.

When Mrs. Chatfield approached the quadrangle she saw that the door of one of the loose-boxes stood open. Voices drifted across to her from the paddock at the back of the stables. She walked to it. Mike was leading a bay pony up to Johnnie. "He's got a nice turn of speed and a good lep in him," the groom was saying. He took his hand off the rein of

the watering-bridle and touched his hat to her. Then in a confidential whisper to the boy, "He's in the Book indeed, but I just forget the breeding."

She shook hands with Mike.

"Is that a new hack?"

"Yes, mum, it is and it isn't, but not one of ours. It's one we're keeping for Captain Vaughan."

"Captain Vaughan. Who is he?"

"A friend of Miss Marion. He's been going back to South Africa for some time, but he's in England still, for didn't I get a letter from him yesterday? Your young gentleman should have a hunt on this pony, I was telling him."

"Perhaps he will, when he gets his leave at Christmas. Has Captain Vaughan been here much?"

"Well, he has, and he hasn't. He's been living over at Frindlesham along with his sister, mending up after the fever."

"Johnnie, we shall miss our train if we don't go back to the house now. Cousin Marion has ordered an early tea for us. Thank you, Mike." She nodded affably. Her greetings to the old retainers held something more than their usual heartiness to-day. She took her son's arm.

"Rather funny of Marion to stand somebody's horse here, isn't it, mum? I wish she'd keep a nag for me."

"Very funny," his mother answered grimly. "We'll find out about it later, from Mr. Baxter. I was just thinking as I walked up through the gardens that I would speak about the guns before we go away. You tried them this morning, didn't you? Were they too long?"

They were walking rapidly through the fast-growing dusk. Frost was in the air. The sky was still light high above their heads, patterned with home-flying rooks, but a deep frieze of angry grey and gold was painted across it, level with the tree tops. The setting sun lit the bare places in the wood with gleams of fire. A new moon sharp as a knife-blade rode in the calm amber above the house.

"It's a new moon, Johnnie; turn your money."

He rattled a few coins in his pocket ruefully.

"That's not going to help much."

"Anyway, better than seeing it through glass."

Mrs. Chatfield was bowing obsequiously to the silver sickle. "I can't think who Captain Vaughan can be. An impecunious young soldier of course, or he wouldn't be stabling his pony here."

"He can't be so very juvenile if he's a Captain. He must be a tremendous pal of Cousin Marion's anyway."

His mother stopped suddenly.

"What do you mean? What an extraordinary idea! Marion hasn't got any friends—not like that."

"Like what?"

"The men who came here were all your uncle's friends. She never would . . . she never could . . ."

They had reached the house and stopped for a moment to watch the rooks swirling above its chimneys. They were sweeping in from far and wide in narrowing circles to their winter quarters, the parent-rookery in the hollow. The stillness of evening was disturbed by the deep diapason of their cawings.

"Plenty of rooks still, I'm glad to see. It's a sign of bad luck when they leave a place. I remember them so well in my childhood."

John was not interested, but he put his walking-stick to his shoulder as if he were taking a pot-shot at one.

"D'you think she'll mind giving me her father's guns?"

"Certainly not, why should she? What use will they ever be to her? I wonder who'll take the shooting. It would be so nice if it were someone we knew. Lord Kilmayne, for instance. Then you'd be able to have a day here occasionally. The people on the estate would like that. There's such a

strong feeling for the family. What else did old Mike tell you about Captain Vaughan?"

"Nothing. We were looking at the other hunters before you came up. I suppose they'll be sent to Tattersalls' now, all except Marion's three."

Mrs. Chatfield entered the house breezily. She took off her goloshes under the watchful eyes of Sellars, and bustled into the library, followed by her son.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Baxter, so glad to see you. What a glorious afternoon it's been, but it's turning chilly now the sun has gone down. You haven't seen John for ages? Don't you think he's tall? Six-foot-two in his stockings, and still growing, I do believe. He's enjoyed his day here. In the morning Mackintosh took him out into the roots to walk up some partridges, but they only got a few rabbits—the birds got up too wide. He's a very good shot, I'm pleased to say. Since luncheon he's been looking round the stables."

The agent smiled sympathetically. He was rolling up some maps which lay spread out on the writing-table, then he engaged John in conversation. Mrs. Chatfield was glad. She wanted to devote this last half-hour to a tête-à-tête with Marion; there was a great deal to say and the two others were obviously not listening.

She had not seen her niece since Mr. Grimshaw had explained to her the contents of the will in his office at Lincoln's Inn, three weeks ago. The solicitor had told her then that her son had been left a legacy of £5000 by his uncle. Johnnie was heir to Foxley in the event of Marion dying unmarried or without issue. The estate was tied up as stringently as the law could devise; the young man had no power of anticipating his reversion. Marion was sole trustee. Sir Thomas' will had been written on a half sheet of paper and was dated the year of his wife's death. How strange, Mrs. Chatfield remarked, that her brother had been so secretive about the disposal of his property. She had discovered now, however, that her husband knew, but he too was secretive—owing perhaps to his poor health, she explained to the lawyer, whilst her eyes roved round the room and rested on the black tin boxes marked "Foxley Estates" and "Sir Thomas Verlander."

Bernard Chatfield's bronchial asthma had obliged him to live permanently in Devonshire, she continued. "Yes, dear Mr. Grimshaw, that is all the reward he reaped for his long years in India—his practice in the High Court at Allahabad wore him out. Rather too bad, isn't it, to have to retire to Devonshire—to a shelf in Devonshire—after such

devoted service." Of course this had been an enormous disadvantage to her son. " Things might have been quite different if we had lived near Foxley. Well, my husband takes the line that John is very lucky to have this little windfall—so like a man! Of course he will come into the place eventually, and perhaps it's just as well that he should not have the responsibility now, whilst he's so young. I can't help feeling sorry for poor Marion. Perhaps it would have been wiser if my brother had arranged it otherwise, for Johnnie has me and his father to guide him, and she has *nobody*—not a soul—except you, of course, and Mr. Baxter. My husband has been very strange about the whole business. 'What's all this nonsense you're feeding John up with?' he used to say to me. 'Why do you think he'll come into the estate?'—and all the time he was spoofing me—all the time Bernard *knew*."

It was a very long time before Mr. Grimshaw had been able to get Mrs. Chatfield out of his office on that day. After two hours with him she drove away in a four-wheeler; she was afraid of a hansom, she said, when the wood pavement was wet.

It was Marion's turn now to listen to one of her soliloquies. They were seated at the window, the twilight darkness was leaning against the thick-sashed

panes, but it was still possible to see the trees etched along the skyline.

"We've had a most pleasant day here, my dear girl. I'm so sorry we have to leave now, but as I explained in my letter I'm staying for the week-end with John's Company Commander." She dropped her voice and looked in the direction of the men. "*Entre nous*, I've had most satisfactory accounts from Major Turnbull—he speaks of John in the highest terms. He's so keen about everything, his work and his games—and of course sport—a regular Verlander. Don't you see a look of your father? He's fairer, of course, but the same figure. It always grieves me when I think how little of his childhood has been spent here. That wasn't dear Tom's fault, or yours, I know. Just Bernard's bronchial asthma. Budleigh Salterton seems the only place that suits him. Now of course it will all be different. John hopes to be here a great deal."

Marion took up her knitting.

"Although he scarcely knows Foxley I've talked to him such a lot about it, ever since he was quite a little chap in sailor suits. When we used to sit on our verandah after tiffin he used to ask me if there were tigers in England (he was mad about *shikar*). I would describe to him how, some day, he would stand outside the garden woods at Foxley and shoot

the high pheasants there: they always come so well at that stand. . . .”

The kettle was brought in.

“What regiment is he going into?”

“Some marching one, I suppose. It would have been delightful to have him in the 17th Lancers, your father’s. But we can’t afford that. It was a great struggle sending him to Harrow, but I am so tenacious of the family tradition.”

“Was Uncle Bernard at Harrow?”

“No, he went to Rugby. I mean the Verlander tradition. But I’m glad we did. Johnnie got into the eleven and he was one of the best centre-forwards they ever had at Vanity Watson’s house.”

Marion moved to the tea-table. Aunt Kitty followed her. “You know, Johnnie had a perfect hero-worship for his Uncle Tom. He was asking me to-day if he might have some little personal souvenir of him. I said I was sure he could. He admired his uncle’s fine horsemanship, and he knew he was a magnificent shot.”

“I wonder what he would like.” The tea was being measured carefully, four spoonfuls and one for the pot. “I wonder what sort of thing he would like; one of Father’s hunting-whips, or a flask, or a cigarette-case?” Marion felt a tug at her heart at the request.

"What about dear Tom's guns? They'll not be used now, will they? The Purdies. Mackintosh is cleaning the one John shot with this afternoon. Shall I tell him to put them into their case? Then the boy can take them away with him."

She did not reply.

"Come on, Johnnie," she called across the room, but her son made no sign of obeying. He flushed and turned his back on her. "We'd better have tea first," Marion suggested, "or it will get so strong." They sat at the low table by the fireside.

"That's an awfully nice pony you've got in the stables, Cousin Marion, and Mike says he jumps like a stag." Johnnie was speaking with his mouth full of crumpet. "Some of the fellows at Sandhurst play polo in the summer term."

"Is that Captain Vaughan's pony you mean?" Mr. Baxter asked.

"Yes, it's a very good one," she answered smoothly.

"Is he for sale? He can't be much use to his owner if he's serving in South Africa."

"I'm keeping him here for the winter. I don't know what will be done with him after that. More tea, Aunt Kitty?"

"I wonder if he's a relation of those Vaughans I know at Exeter—charming people—they have a

son, I think, but he can't be much older than you, John?" She turned to the agent as if he would be able to enlighten her. "It's so funny that though Marion and Johnnie are first cousins there's such a big difference in their ages. I married late, as you remember, and this young man"—she slapped her son's blue serge back—"was not born till seven years after."

"I don't like to remind you of the time, Auntie, but if you really want to catch the five-fifty, I think you ought to be getting off."

Everybody went into the front hall.

"Will you give James the order about the guns, dear? I'm sure Mackintosh is still in the house. It will be so much more convenient, and safer than sending them off by rail."

No option was left to Marion; she walked back into the library to ring the bell.

Mrs. Chatfield continued to talk with increased animation to the other two. John's kit-bag was being stowed under the seat of the dog-cart. A few minutes later James brought the gun-case through into the hall. Its locks were shining like burnished gold, on the polished Russian-leather lid Sir Thomas Verlander's name was stamped in block letters.

"Awfully good of you to give me the guns, Cousin Marion," John said, going up to her and

brushing her cheek with his full red one. "Good-bye. I'll value them tremendously. If you're interested in Rugger, I wish you'd come to Sandhurst on the 11th of next month. We're playing 'the Shop,' it ought to be a good game."

Sellars stood vigilant, enthralled as if he were the audience at a peep-show.

Mrs. Chatfield, after enveloping Marion in an over-arm embrace, clambered into the front seat of the dog-cart, whilst Mr. Baxter held out a protecting hand to guard her skirt from the wheel. The gun-case was placed at her feet. John nipped up behind.

"Good-bye, dear," she waved triumphantly from her perch.

"Shall we go back to look at those plans now?" Marion asked Mr. Baxter as soon as the carriage had driven away. She was deeply stirred. The guns were the first thing belonging to her father which she had seen leave the house never to return. Whilst the estate agent was explaining to her the partition of a farm into two smaller holdings, she thought of them continuously. They seemed to her like the instruments of a musician who can evoke their potentiality by the magic of his touch. The picture of him with one held snugly under his arm when she walked beside him across meadow and stubble

dwelt with her. She seemed to hear the sharp crack of the report stab the drowsing gold of an autumn evening, and the echoes of the shot eddying round the valley ; the little puff of smoke left behind the pungent, sickly-sweet smell of gunpowder. It was not only the guns she was parting with, it was the blissful moments in her life that had slipped away from her for all time.

“ This is the one-inch ordnance map I have here, Miss Marion,” Mr. Baxter was saying. “ It is proposed by the County Council that the new school at Little Lavenham should be built here—where I have put the pencil-mark, on the north side of the village street, as you see. With your assent I shall offer them this other site, fifty yards below the Post Office. I have the architect’s plans if you would like to glance at them.”

She was not attending to him, but the word “ school ” had fallen on her ears. Poor Johnnie, he was not much more than a schoolboy after all—with his blunt boxing-glove of a face and his expressionless china-blue eyes. Small blame to him if he coveted a gun. . . . The reading of the old letters in the Deed Room with her father came back to her on the eve of his illness. Many of these described the joyous preparations for the advent of Verlander boys returning to their home. . . .

“ You approve ? Then I will write and confirm the price.”

Sons at Foxley—the price of them would be far above rubies !

“ Anything more for the post, Miss ? ” The evening delivery was brought to her. She took the little pile from the salver. Bills, bills, circulars, a letter from Mary Usherwood (that would be about the Cake and Candy Sale at the Vicarage in aid of the Nursing Association, next week), two bulb catalogues, a post card from the London Library asking for the return of a book. At the bottom of the heap was a letter in a hand she knew, but she turned it over to glance at the back of the envelope in order to make sure.

“ I’ll be moving off then, if you have nothing more for me to do.”

After Mr. Baxter had left the room she opened the letter. Luke Vaughan wrote that he would be in London all the following week—they would be his last days in England. Was there a chance she might be there too ?—in that case he would like to come and see her. But he would quite understand if she said no.

After Marion had dressed for dinner she told Newman that she would be going to London early on Tuesday.

XIV

“WHERE shall we put these marrows ? How very fine they are.” The organist’s wife looked despairingly at them.

“And the beets,” the pupil-teacher added. She had hurried down as soon as school had been dismissed. The church was full of workers. Stooping figures were piling sheaves of corn round the lectern, and some young person, unobserved, had hung a bunch of grapes in the beak of the brass eagle. That was a little flippant, and would be condemned by Mary Usherwood when she arrived.

“How are we going to do the altar vases ?” the Vicar’s wife lamented. “There are so few white flowers at this time of year.” And that is true, in autumn Nature uses the most vivid colours on her palette to make up for the long months of drabness which lie ahead.

From the vestry came the sound of gushing water being poured into jam-pots ; they did yeoman service at the triennial church decoration. “Anybody got any wire or raffia ? I want to tie some moss round these,” came a voice from within.

Contributions were flowing in by the West door in almost overwhelming quantities. Every few minutes a villager arrived laden with colourless Michaelmas daisies or with flaunting sunflowers. "We shan't be able to use half all this," was being whispered round. The flowers were flagging already. The weather was against them, a true St. Luke's summer, hot as July, and this its hottest day. A "borrowed day," country folk call it, not belonging to the season of mists. It was quite pleasant for a while to be out of the midday sun, and to have the Norman arches overhead instead of the scorching blue of the sky.

The church was filled with the scent of earth, wet stones, and leaves, and the bitter sweet fragrance of October flowers. It seemed too venerable to deck with posies; rather like hanging a daisy-chain round a greybeard's neck: but such considerations did not weigh with the helpers. They were massing flowers everywhere, as far and as high as their busy hands could reach.

Miss Porter arrived on the scene, purposeful as usual, provided with raffia and her gardening scissors. She tied her exuberant spaniel in the porch. An occasional heartrending yowl announced its presence there.

When the workers began, they had spoken in

low voices and walked on tiptoe, but as their number and their enthusiasm grew, restraint was thrown aside and the spirit of rivalry came into play. No sooner had a trophy of cauliflowers and onions been tastefully arranged by one than it was demolished by another, who replaced it with a bouquet of marigolds and parsley. The conversation drifted from the work in hand to other subjects.

The postman's wife, binding gladioli to the screen, asked a member of the choir about to-morrow's anthem.

"We're having the same as last year," Mrs. Moore (the only alto) replied. "We really haven't had the opportunity to prepare another. We never get a full attendance at practice in the summer, so many are away for holidays, and the young ones don't turn up as they used to. They like to wander about the lanes with their young men in the evenings nowadays. So it's going to be 'Thou givest them their meat in due season' again. Talking of meat, isn't it expensive? I've had to pay as much as elevenpence a pound for ribs, *ribs*—wicked. I suppose it's the war that makes everything so dear—it should be a proper thanksgiving this time for the farmers! For once they can't grumble. . . . Poor Miss Verlander, wasn't it sudden! (can you lend me your nippers?). I do feel sorry for her.

Whatever will she do alone in that big place? Pity she never married, she devoted all her life to Sir Thomas, and now he's gone.

"I never heard of his illness till last week. I'd gone down to the butcher's to buy the beef (I like to have it boned and rolled), and I met Mr. Baxter coming down the street and stopped to ask him about the sink he's promised me. It was then that he told me. It all began with a chill—but chills is dangerous at his age. My father was took just the same, and I never knew a healthier man."

"Then look at the Squire," Mrs. Wethered junior answered her. "Why, he danced like a boy at the servants' ball in January. He'll be greatly missed. May I trouble you for the return of my wire-nippers? I'll go down to the font now. I always like helping at that. Three of mine were baptized here."

"Now you kiddies," Mrs. Moore advised a cluster of children, "you cut and run to your dinners. Thank you for what you've brought us, and don't be late for Sunday School to-morrow." They obeyed reluctantly, giving a wide berth to the canine banshee in the porch who sniffed disconcertingly at their bare legs as they passed him.

"What are we going to put on the altar?"

Mrs. Piercey's complaint was repeated, like the lines in a Greek chorus, whenever there was a lull in the activities. "We've nothing suitable in the Vicarage garden. That slight frost three nights ago cut all my dahlias. We've always had hot-house flowers from Foxley before, but I don't suppose Marion knows we have a Harvest Festival to-morrow (so awkward her being a Roman), and of course I can't remind her just now. Do they have Harvest Festival in Catholic churches?" Miss Porter could not supply the information. Having aired her grievance Mrs. Piercey left her, to join a friend in the chancel. "I know the loveliest flowers go from the Hall to St. Joseph's," she continued. "I've often seen her driving down to Brackenham with them, and it always makes me a little jealous, I'm afraid."

The Vicar had come in by another door and was walking down the aisle slowly. It looked as if the dessert fruit of some fee-fi-fo-fum giant had been served, where the pyramid of swedes and marrows was stacked under the pulpit.

*" Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Ensnared with flowers . . . "*

murmured the Rev. Edward Piercey to his wife.

" Stumble—I hope you won't do that, dear,

to-morrow. The leaves and petals on the flags *are* rather dangerous. I'll get the charwoman to sweep up everywhere carefully."

"I was only quoting—quoting some lines of Andrew Marvell," he reassured her with his wide bland smile. "All this is most beautiful and gratifying, I hope we shall have a large congregation to enjoy it. I've arranged for the fruit and flowers to be taken to the Infirmary on Monday morning." They prepared to leave the church.

The clock struck twelve as Mrs. Phipps and her sister arrived. The ladies expressed anxiety about the baskets they had brought with them. "Nobody has any conscience about baskets—or umbrellas. I've had a label tied on to mine, all the same I think it would be wiser to take it away with me." She emptied it of the contents, and made a tour of inspection. "That's the Verlander pew," she explained. "Poor Marion. . . . My husband wants to know what will happen to Sir Thomas's racing stable. What happens after a death? Do the horses run in somebody else's colours? Charles backed one of his in the November Handicap. It has shortened in price, and he hoped to lay him on the day. Surely it won't have to be scratched! I suppose one ought not to talk racing in church, I'm glad the Vicar can't overhear me. Yes, that's

the family vault. I never like the idea of vaults myself. . . . There were no flowers—by request. I always think a funeral without flowers seems so heartless. Now come on, Theresa, there's nothing we can do here, and it will take us three-quarters of an hour to get home. My cook is always so annoyed if we are late for luncheon."

As their pony-cart drove out of the village it passed the Foxley brougham.

"I wonder if that's Marion. I don't think I ought to wave, do you?" But before she could investigate, the carriage had turned the bend, and was out of sight.

When Marion reached the lych-gate she waited to see if there was anybody about before she got out with her arms full of auratum lilies. The churchyard was deserted, and when she pushed open the door of the church there was no sound in it but the muffled tick of the belfry clock, like the beat of a strong heart. She went straight to the old box pew on the north side of the nave, and sat down on its faded red moreen cushions. She felt safe here, and concealed.

The same sense of unreality was with her as on the day when her father's coffin had rested in the chancel. Just now she seemed to be looking dispassionately at her grief, like a doctor who is leaning over a

sick-bed. She was analysing her reactions to pain. Hers was not an emotion which transmutes the soul, it was a childish agony, fierce and rebellious, it was the passion of an animal trapped or caged which is struggling for escape. There had been moments when her sense of prisoned loneliness grew less acute. She found her father again—his essence, that which of all things she dreaded most to lose—in the words of labourers or farm-hands. They spoke of him to her without embarrassment: death was no stranger to them, but the expected visitor whom they greeted with trustful eyes. At such times her father seemed very near—no departed saint, but an actual presence.

“The Squire was set on having this cottage re-roofed, that’s why we’ve gotten on to the job right away. He talked of having it done proper, not just patched up, last time he came this way.” Or, across a hedgerow, some simple act of contrition: “I ain’t done the layin’ of this fence thoroughly before, but Squire was most pertickler on having the quicks cut, so there be no weak places in it for the sheep to get through, and I’ve give it a rare doing.” And only this morning a small child had stopped her in the back drive with, “Please, m’m, ain’t there to be no fireworks or bonfire in the park on Guy Fawkes’ Day? Mother said there won’t, becos of

your trouble." Nonsense, child, because of him, fuller joy, greater security.

Before leaving the church Marion went to the back of the pew, into what had been the Lady Chapel. Here stood the fine canopied tomb of a seventeenth-century Verlander and his wife. Their alabaster pall fell in rigid folds, on the plinth below was inscribed the record of their virtues. Opposite, in a niche of the wall, was the memorial to another pair "of Foxlie." The Tudor figures, a prie-dieu between them, knelt at prayer, behind each a row of kneeling children with hands raised piously ; five daughters in the mother's train and three sons in the father's. Most of the colour had faded from the group, and she had to look long and close before she could read the lettering, but the gilding on the scroll around the escutcheon was still bright. Where would her father's monument find room ? All the way home Marion wondered whether she wished him to join that mute company of his ancestors, for his spirit seemed to live in the landscape of his home, in the meadows where the aftermath was greening, and the warm plough lately stripped, amongst the fields and woods where he had found *Joye sans fin*.

"Any more orders to-day ?" the coachman asked as she got out of the brougham. None. She

had letters to write, scores of them, would she ever be able to answer all those that had flowed in ? Up till now all she had done was to leave them in her writing-desk, but the time had come to reply. Directly after luncheon she sat down to her task and opened the top drawer, but the bundles in their rubber garters were not in this one. Instead she found a copy of a local newspaper she had put aside here for her scrap-book, several months ago. It contained an account of a farmers' dinner given to celebrate the Jubilee of her father's succession to the estate, when an Address to him had been presented by the tenantry.

The scene came back to her with the pang from memory's two-edged sword. Almost before she knew what she was doing, she began to read the speech he had made on that March day, and the poor blurred photograph of him which headed the column took life. . . .

“ Mr. Wethered's statement that for fifty years I have been his landlord is true. I could have wished it were not so, for it is an association which I cannot reasonably expect to last for many more. Looking back over this time I have only pleasant memories to record. I was a lad of twenty-two when I became owner of Foxley

and it is my tenants who taught me all I know about it. The science of the management of land is one that can never be fully mastered. The book was put into my hands early, and after all these years I am still conning my lesson. One thing, however, stands out, the importance of the tie which unites landlord and tenant. There is much talk about the future of agriculture. The future of agriculture, like the future of any business, depends upon co-operation. The absentee landlord, or the fellow who looks to high rents and has no appreciation for good farming, does not deserve to prosper. But to judge between the true husbandman and the hireling needs knowledge.

“ I have always loved the land. I loved it as a boy when I learned to ride and shoot over it, but it is a capricious mistress, whose moods are various. To the best of my ability I have served her faithfully, and so have you.

“ It’s an ill wind, they say, which does not bring some blessing. This war has brought much suffering in its train, but there is no doubt that because of it farming interests have improved. Heaven knows they needed to ! But when I ride over my own farms I think of South Africa where the Boers are fighting for

their homesteads. I am not going to discuss the justice or injustice of their case, but I would like to give a thought to those whose houses and holdings are being wrecked, and who are fighting to defend them. Well, gentlemen, the farmer has always to struggle to protect his acres. The enemy is ever at his door, he has to keep watch and ward in peace-time as in war. He stands up in this country to be shot at by weather, disease, and foreign competition. As to the landowner, he is at the mercy of the political winds, the interference of Government departments, and the efforts of those who would like, by whatever means, to sever the old associations.

“I remember once when I was abroad (it was in France or Belgium) watching an old peasant who was working on his roots. He looked up at me and showed me his hoe. ‘This,’ said he, ‘is the pen with which I am writing on the soil’—I reckon that is what the tiller of the land is always doing. He writes on it the story of his labour—his discouragement and his success.

“If I had to write something on mine now, though I am no scribe with either pen or tool, I would write first some words of gratitude to all those who have farmed my land, in another sentence I would record my affection for every

rood of it, and the last would be a message of goodwill to the one who will follow after me. I have no son to take my place when I am gone, but I am leaving Foxley in safe hands . . . you know them."

Marion could not read any further; the faded type swam before her brimming eyes. She folded the newspaper and replaced it.

"Any more orders?" she had been asked when she got home to-day. She had received her father's. A great calm spread over the troubled waters of her spirit.

XV

THEY had been sitting together for a time when Madame Grandchose asked Marion, "How do you like my garret, what an American called my sky-parlour? You see I have a view of the Oratory from one window, and a little leafage to gladden my eyes and refresh my spirit—not very green now, but in the summer it made me think of Verlaine's verses :

‘ *Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,
Si bleu, si calme.
Un arbre par-dessus le toit
Berce sa palme.*’

You know the poem called *D'une Prison*? They comfort me and give me peace and courage. Alas ! how many of us make our own captivity."

"Do we?"

"Yes. By lack of courage. But, after we have reached the age of reason, that shouldn't be ; we should know how to break our bonds."

"What is the age of reason?"

"Some never attain it, so they remain in durance

vile—till the end. But you are not one of those unfortunates. I am going to make a little space on this table, room on it for a glass of *porto blanc*. I hope you will not say no ? ” She got up from her chair and swept a piece of petit-point from the card-table, then with large adroit hands she collected the cards spread out on it.

“ You were playing patience ? ”

“ Heaven forbid ! One should never play patience. That is a game at which one always loses. I was asking a question of the cards, but they will not always answer. Would you like me to ask one for you ? ”

The two little packs had been stacked, and were lying face upwards on the shabby green cloth.

“ No, thanks, I’m not superstitious, or perhaps I’m too superstitious.”

But in spite of her refusal the Frenchwoman began to shuffle. There was something soothing in her action and in the whirring sound the cards made, like the wind in the wings of a bird.

“ I think I shall do so all the same, but it shall be my question, not yours. First I must see which card represents you. Are you hearts or diamonds ? Look at me—it’s diamonds—your eyes are grey, not blue.” Madame Grandchose kept hers on Marion’s face, rather longer than she liked. She felt herself

blushing under the scrutiny. Madame was laying several cards in a row and she continued to arrange them in a complicated pattern. "It was so good of you to come here to-day. I am very much touched that you should have climbed my four flights of steep stairs to pay me a *visite d'adieu*—for I am going back to France next week. Yes, really . . . and Heaven knows when I shall return—perhaps never. I shall not forget the summer I have spent here ; I have met with so much kindness, so much sympathy, especially in your house. Would you believe it, I had a visit from another of the charming people who belong to my Foxley souvenirs, only two days ago—Monsieur le Capitaine Vaughan. We had a pleasant chat in the twilight at the corner of my fire ; he came in about seven. Will you cut the cards and arrange them in three *paquets* ? I take the top one of each and arrange them so—the next three thus, and I go on till . . ."

A barrel-organ began to play immediately under the windows. The jangling explosion from the pavement made them both start.

"Perfect—we have an orchestra gratis. . . . Here you are." She put the queen of diamonds in the centre of the radiating lines. "Yes, the delightful Captain Vaughan visited me on Tuesday—of course he had discovered my address through you ? I was

really quite *émue* to think that he should have taken the trouble to come and see an elderly lady like me. We talked a long time together."

"What did you talk about?"

"We talked of a hundred things—one can talk with him—and, may I say so without offending, there are not many of your male compatriots with whom one can sit and converse, except of the weather or cricket or hunting. I'm sorry for the men, but it's the women I should pity, though after so many years they have accustomed themselves to it. One sees that in your art. In the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the English school, the masters, Reynolds and Gainsborough, seldom represent their exquisite models in an *intérieur*, waiting in full dress for the visit of husband or lover. No, they are in movement always—in a park—under trees—with the clouds above them, listening to the language of the birds, or of the man who wants to shoot them (neither is profound). Unstudied as Nature which frames them, they are going *au-devant de la vie*. I made this reflection when I saw the fine examples which have been lent to the Pavillon Anglais at the Paris Exposition.

"But Captain Vaughan and I discussed other things than sport. . . . How do you like this aria which the serenader is treating us to? Half the

notes in his old musical-box are broken, but that adds sentiment to the tune—*La Donna è mobile*. We talked of the acquaintances we had in common and, of course, we talked of you. . . . Please take the bottom card from this bunch and give it me. Now I must count these. Tell me to stop when you feel inclined.”

She leant back in her chair and began counting loudly and rapidly in French, then in more muted tones and finally in a sibilant whisper. *Trente-quatre, trente-cinq, trente-six, trente-sept, trente-huit.*”

“Stop !”

She obeyed. “Why ?”

“Because that’s my age.”

“No reason to stop at that. I am going to do the same with this other little pile.” She began on it in silence till she came to the bottom card, calling : “*Bon*—there are twenty-eight—and that, he tells me, is his.”

Marion had not meant to say “Ten years,” but, having said it, she hoped the fortune-teller had not overheard her.

“Yes, ten years. What strange fatalistic things are numbers ! Napoleon attached grave importance to them. Have you ever seen the little book he used to consult the fates ? By the combinations of numbers he could foretell the future. Ten years was the

difference in age between Mary Clarke and her husband. Curious coincidence ! I tell you that numbers at times exert sinister influences on our lives—and yet they are only meaningless formulae, paltry measures, devised to cramp and limit us. Think of the astronomical ones and then the enfranchised spirit soars. A few more or less million years and this little planet of ours may be shattered into star-dust. Our distance from the sun is—how many miles ?—but from happiness it cannot be estimated by either time or place. Should we consider them, when we are within reach of joy ? Child's play—meaningless as these cards which I am now going to sweep off the table, for here comes your glass of port and your biscuit.”

A slatternly maid brought them in.

“ While you sip it, let me show you some of my little possessions, from which I am never parted. I cling perhaps too fondly to material objects. That is another way of putting oneself *en prison*—of clipping one's wings. We should travel light through life, like the swallows who make their *chez soi* everywhere, and exchange the azure sky of Egypt for the grey clouds of England, and are as much at home in the shelter of an English barn as in the shadows of the Pyramids. Yet here am I trying to make this horrid lodging-house in the Brompton

Road into a semblance of my dear home by surrounding myself with my pictures." She put into Marion's hands a faded photograph of a small château. "This is the house of my grandfather—the river Marne flows below the terrace—and here is the portrait of my father in his uniform of *fantassin*. He was killed before Metz. And this little view of the Place de la Concorde, you know it? There is the statue of Strasbourg. Ever since '71 she wears her scarf of crêpe; she is looking with tranquil eyes into the future, knowing that some day she will be liberated. She is another who dares not count the years! When our victorious armies avenge my father's death, that fluttering mourning band will be removed. She is within measurable and yet immeasurable reach of happiness. . . . I keep this photograph on my desk beside his, with a bouquet of flowers before them."

The bell of the flat shrilled. "Pardon me, I am my own *valet de chambre*." Madame Grandchose left the room abruptly. Marion could hear the conversation in the passage.

"*Mon cher*, you come earlier than your usual hour. It's inconvenient. You are here at four-thirty, and it's at five that I always expect you. Never mind—I have a charming visitor to whom you shall be presented. . . ."

She re-entered the room followed by a man in the early thirties, carefully gloved, with blond hair cut *en brosse*.

"Permit me to introduce you to the Baron d'Hauteville—" she smiled—" *mon neveu*." Marion had got up to go. He bowed and kissed her hand.

"You leave us—already?"

She explained that she had someone coming to tea and he escorted her down the stairs.

"Brown's Hotel," Marion called to the cabby as he whipped up his horse, and they jingled up the half-lighted road where the lamplighter had begun on his round.

She had not met anyone she knew in London, but Newman, of course, had. Each day she brought back news items from the shops she visited.

"I met Mrs. Tryon's maid in the Park. She told me Captain Vaughan was going back to South Africa soon, but I don't suppose it will be for long. I couldn't get anything I wanted in the haberdashery at Woolland's—they said they were stock-taking" (that was what Newman was doing too). "Mrs. Chaplin, the Duchess' housekeeper, was buying glass-cloths there, she says they are stronger than those from the Army and Navy, I must tell Mrs. Tansy. They've got a shooting party at the

Abbey next week and they'll be eighteen in the Steward's Room. She says the new chef is quite a pleasant man, though he's rather frenchified, but she doesn't mind that. Her Grace has taken to bicycling—nobody ever thought she would. Her maid is making bloomers for her ; it doesn't seem quite right, does it ? People seem to do all sorts nowadays ! His Grace is very satisfied with the election results, and he's so pleased the War Office is going to grant one rifle to every ten men who are joining these Rifle Corps all over England. The young Marquis is taking a great interest in the one they've started at Brackenhams. . . . Harrod's is a nice shop—what a pity it's in the Brompton Road, not in the West End. . . . I went from Marble Arch to Marshall's yesterday by the Central London Railway, the Twopenny Tube, as they call it. I thought I should be frightened and p'raps come over faint, but I didn't. The man who works the lift says the trains have gone splendid ever since they began running this summer. Seems funny—electric trains."

Newman, like Gossip Jones, had a budget full of talking.

Marion felt very small and lonely as she drove through a landscape of deserted streets where the

curled and yellowed leaves of sycamores were blowing. The windows of Belgravian houses, close-blinded, looked down on four-wheelers heaped with luggage. An occasional station omnibus lumbered past. She had asked Luke Vaughan to come at five and the black marble clock on the draped mantelpiece was pointing to the hour when she got back from Madame Grandchose. A sudden shyness made her dread the opening of the door of her sitting-room. She seemed to have forgotten to-day what Luke Vaughan looked like. What was he after all but a stranger? "A stranger to me," that was one of Sellars' expressions. He was tall and clean-shaven and his face so thin that the skin was tight-stretched across the high cheek-bones, but what his eyes were like she had forgotten, except that they were golden, like a falcon's; his smile came back to her, but his smiles were rare. The knock at her door was the answer to a note of interrogation.

"I'm rather late, I'm afraid," Luke apologised. He explained that he had been kept at the War Office.

"Only ten minutes"—her eyes went back to the onyx clock on the draped mantelpiece.

"I pelted back from Scotland, as you know, leaving the loveliest salmon-trout fishing behind me, because I thought they were sending me out

with a draft, and now, of course, the date has been changed."

"Isn't that a relief?"

"Yes, I suppose it is, but, when something damnable lies ahead, a reprieve isn't much satisfaction."

He sat down and lit a cigarette.

"How are you?"

This time there was no evading his eyes.

"I'm quite well, thank you"—the answer she always gave to the old doctor at home when he was attending her, and which he always laughed at.

"You've had a very bad time and you must be awfully tired."

How did he know about her fatigue? It was a burden—heavy as that which Atlas carried. "I suppose I am really." Admission weakened her endurance; she felt the stinging rush of tears, but after weeks of practice she had them in control.

"It seems such a little while ago that we were having such good fun together at Foxley. That day I took you out in my car and I was benighted—and Ascot week—and that jolly day's cubbing. . . . I saw your father at Goodwood; he was in splendid form. He had a wonderful way of putting people at their ease; he talked to me as if I were his age—he made a man of every mouse."

After she had weathered that moment of emotion she felt restored. The perfect unselfconsciousness with which Luke was talking of her father, as if he expected to see him on the morrow, was bracing.

"Sir Thomas must have had a marvellous life; he 'dwelt among his own,' and that for a chap like me, who has always been harried from pillar to post—who has no 'own'—seems as unattainable and precious as the Holy Grail. I just can't imagine Foxley without him."

"Nor can I," said Marion.

"Anyway, it's got you."

"But I'm nothing," she protested.

"Yes, you're half of him. You'll have to do the work of two, that's all. You're not afraid of work, are you?"

"No, but I'm afraid of loneliness."

"Loneliness is a condition of the soul. Sorrow is not the only soil in which it flourishes."

"Perhaps not, but I miss him so much," she said childishly.

"You wouldn't have it otherwise. Your objective life with him has ended, but the subjective remains; once the pain passes . . ."

"But the pain will never pass."

"I ought to have said 'when the pain changes,' for all pain does. One suffers physical pain, thinking

that it will continue always, and then something happens, some readjustment in ourselves, I imagine. What was intolerable becomes tolerable and one forgets the measure of the worst."

"That's what I'm afraid of—growing case-hardened."

"But there's where you're wrong ; that is denying the economic law of life."

"I don't want to live, particularly."

"The choice is not offered you. What about Foxley, and the people there ? You belong to them ; they have a first charge on you."

"I know."

"Of course you know, and it's cheek of me to talk to you in this way. . . . I want to ask you about Twinkie. I'm sure it's a bother for you to have my pony now. I can send him to my sister's. They can run him out there, and take him into the stable at night."

"Don't do that ; I like having him."

"By the way, I must tell you—I went to see your old lecturer the other day."

"I've seen her too. She told me you had called. She wrote me such an understanding letter. The French know how to lend grace to every sentence, even in a letter of condolence. Theirs have a perfect shape, like a Grecian urn."

"Yes—but don't they enjoy the trappings of woe? the *Pompes funèbres*. Think of their letters with the inch-wide black edgings!"

"It should be a warning to us, I suppose, not to put the same around our thoughts."

The plated teapot, deposited on the peacock-blue chenille tablecloth, burnt her hand when she tried to lift it.

"Let me do that," he said, grasping the handle; "it's a service of danger."

"Before I forget," he said, when he had poured out for her, "I've brought you some old snapshots which I found amongst a lot I was clearing out at Frindlesham. Some of them were taken ages ago when I was at the Staff College." He handed them to her and came to stand behind her chair. "This one was done at Hawthorne Hill in '97. I'm afraid it's rather under-exposed, but it's a nice one of your father." (He was standing in the weighing enclosure in his riding-boots and breeches; he looked little older than the clean-limbed boy beside him.) "You must have hundreds of your own, but I think these might enlarge quite well if you would care to have them." She put out her hand for the one he held.

"No, that's one of you. I'm going to keep it. Do you remember when it was done? It was that

day you came to a meet of the Staff College Drag. I'm taking it back to South Africa with me. It's been in India too, and looks a little pale after having seen so much of the world." He slipped it back into his pocket-book.

"What are all those in the envelope?"

"Nothing interesting. Snaps taken by a subaltern at Pindi, mostly. That's when I was riding in the Kadir Cup."

She went through them one by one. "I don't think I should have recognised this!"

"Wouldn't you? Yet I haven't altered since those days."

"Then perhaps it's the topee. It throws such a deep shadow across your face—like a mask. . . ."

He looked at her very quietly and waited.

"Am I going to see you again, or are you going back to Foxley at once?"

"I'm not sure about my plans. I may have to stay on here—to see my lawyer."

"Then can I come again to-morrow? I'd like to add to the sum of hours I have spent with you. This summer has given me a lovely harvest of them. But I won't see you again if it's an effort for you."

"It's not."

"Well, then, perhaps before I sail you'll let me come down to Foxley for the day. I want my last

memory of you—the one I shall take away with me—to be of you there. May I come ? ”

She nodded.

“ All right. We’ll fix the day as soon as you know your movements.”

“ Of course you want to see Twinkie, too, before you leave. I haven’t had a ride on him for ages, not since . . . ”

“ I know—but you will later on. You’ll have a gallop on him in that high heathy country where we went cub-hunting that morning : and, when you do, will you remember that my love rides beside you—always ? ”

He got up to fetch his stick and hat, lying on the rosewood sideboard.

“ Are you able to sleep ? You don’t look as if you were.”

“ Not a great deal,” she answered, and already she began to feel those dark bats’ wings which nightly beat against her consciousness.

“ I oughtn’t to have said that to you—it was unfair to talk about myself—but there are moments when one drops the mask before one knows it, and then perhaps one regrets. . . . Shall we forget I ever did ? ”

“ I want you to be yourself with me, always.”

He took her hand to say good-bye.

“ I shall be waiting to hear from you to know when I may come down—don’t keep me waiting.”

After he had gone she picked up the two snapshots he had left her, and looked at them fixedly without seeing anything. For a while the room felt full of him. His words were still eddying round her like the rings made by a stone flung into deep water. Then they faded, and in the silence she became aware of her aloneness.

She got up from her chair and opened the door which led into her bedroom. Its plush curtains were not drawn, and through the inner lace ones the street-lamps gleamed yellow. She felt for the switch of the electric light; as she did so her arm grazed the heavy cheval glass. It began to swing lethargically. Funny old Victorian mirror, how often it had reflected her—as a child in muslin frock and sash, as a schoolgirl with long fair braids, as a *débutante* in shimmering satin ball-dress. The misty surface, framed in its ugly red mahogany, was a palimpsest.

But the dancing child, the long-legged schoolgirl, the young woman with the flower wreath—all were vanished, dead. . . . Those others had heard voices call, “ *Don’t* keep me waiting too long, dear,” but this one, this black-gowned Marion, had not thought to hear that tender plea to-day.

XVI

“ YOU see, Miss, we were expecting you home last Friday, so I didn’t like to start on the planting till your return. I’ve just heeled in the shrubs that Waterer has sent.” There was a note of reproach in the head-gardener’s voice. He and Marion were surveying some plants sloping dejectedly in a long row under the brick wall of the kitchen garden. Their bright cardboard labels were all that could stimulate interest. She stooped to read them.

“ Nice stuff,” said Dewar.

She agreed, but so far only such stuff as dreams are made on. Lilacs, syringas, and clematis were lying here, waiting for her, and for the spring. She continued her inspection. Dewar’s Aberdonian accent gave a reassuring emphasis to his words.

“ We’ve had some terrible rough days. The borders look fair debauched. It isn’t worth doing any more staking so late in the season—we always have these westerly winds at this time o’ year—equinoxious gales,” he added grandiloquently.

It seemed strange to be back at Foxley after a whole week’s absence, and she fancied that, like

Dewar, it wore an aggrieved air. She had played truant and was being treated to a cool reception. She must make amends by giving her close attention to every detail. The roses were mildewed.

“ Couldn’t we spray them ? ”

“ It’s not worth it, so late in the season.” He pulled a leprous shoot between his fingers. “ It’s in their nature to go this way.” Nevertheless she asked him to, lest next year’s flowering should suffer. Live for the future—the philosophy of gardening.

She followed him into the greenhouses. Everywhere was the sign of provident preparation, nothing could be more heartening than this full granary of hope. As Dewar passed the staging he paused here and there to flick a pot, the tap of his finger-nails on its side assured him of the degree of moisture. Gardeners’ hands—how she loved their gestures, she could not watch without envy that close accord between man and plant. It was with the deftness of a surgeon that they pruned, with more than a nurse’s tenderness that they tucked their charges into their earthy beds.

It was always of spring and of summer and of their “ green felicity ” that Dewar spoke. He ignored the long months which divided him from them. But when the tour of inspection ended and she

had to face the withering winds outside the walls, the bright mirage vanished.

Now she was on her way to the kennels. One of the young Labradors gazed at her with dull beseeching eyes from behind its bars. At the sight of her father's shooting-dogs, an arrow of pain flew straight to her heart. She met the keeper on his way to feed them.

"What's wrong with Mark? He looks sick, Mackintosh."

"He's been like that since the beginning of the week, but I thought I wouldn't send for the vet till you came back. Mr. Sellars said you were returning before the end of the week." Once more she felt rebuked.

"We'll get him here to-morrow. Keep the others away from him ; it may be distemper." All young things, what a care they are : old things, what a responsibility !

As soon as she entered the house Sellars told her Mrs. Tansy would like to speak to her. That grim preface, too familiar.

It was about Millie. Millie had given notice. Any particular reason ? None at all that Mrs. Tansy knew of, and (indignantly) "It was only two months since she had received her rise, what's more."

"She says she's unsettled and wants to make a change."

Unsettled after six years—absurd ! How long does it take to make one feel unsettled ? Tansy's ethics admitted there was a definite term at which restlessness may be condoned—after x years perhaps it may be justified. "I'll see her presently," said Marion.

Then it was of the recent bottling of plums that they talked, of the pickled eggs, and the cured hams. Household problems acted as a sedative, and Marion felt her nervous tension relaxed, when Millie, Mike's daughter, knocked at the door.

"You want to leave, Millie ?"

"Not exactly, Miss; but I've given my notice."

"I'm sorry. Is there anything that's worrying you ?"

"No, Miss; but I can't stay on, all the same."

She looked at the little under-housemaid's meek face, rosy cheeks, neatly braided hair, and the steadfast determination in her mild eyes.

"I'm always sorry to lose a girl who belongs to the place. Won't you reconsider ?"

"Indeed I can't. You see, I'm getting married. But I shan't be going far. I wouldn't want to be doing that. It's to Joe Pickles." She dimpled.

So Millie's horizon ended where the line of the

park was sharp drawn against the indigo belt of pine-woods. The earth's curve concealed that place to which the sun hurried. She had no wish to explore the chamber to which it retired when it had lavished enough gold on these woods. What then had "unsettled" her? Love, for love can sever love, as diamond cuts diamond.

There was more for Marion to do that evening. Her conscience would allow her no peace till she had carried out what Mr. Baxter had asked her to do. She had promised him before she went to London that she would try to persuade the Langstroths to exchange the cottage where they lived for a roomier one. He had not found it easy to induce them to do so, but there was no doubt that the move ought to be made, for the carter's family had outgrown their house.

It was dusk when she hurried through the formal garden. She could only see the light-coloured flowers, the darker ones were lost in monochrome. This half-light was kind; it concealed the ravages of autumn; but she could recapture the beauty of the heliotrope by its warm breath. But the nicotianas, resolved as always to see the night, opened a few white faces to the sky. She stooped to taste their fragrance, and as she did so moths' wings brushed her face. They had come here to do the

same. Wise insects and wise flowers, curious to see the "seven stars and the moon." How little, thought Marion, do we profit by this hour when the feast is spread for us each evening, after the wind takes shape and the cry of the birds is changed. . . .

The rooks were fidgeting in the elms above her head, flopping from bough to bough, but the jackdaws—much less serious people—were protesting loudly over the drawing-in of the curtains of night.

She could see the scuts of rabbits scampering back to their burrows, white as the tobacco flowers. Were they afraid of being locked out? From under the inky blackness of a patch of furze came a long-drawn piercing cry; a stoat had got one. Her blood froze in her veins. Thrushes and blackbirds, startled at her footsteps, flew from the rhododendrons. She had the feeling that she was disturbing the repose of little creatures, and how much they needed rest and security from the hourly menace of their lives.

Two of the estate men trudged past her on their way home from the village. It was not too dark to recognise them, and their hearty voices were comforting.

Was it inconsiderate of her to call so late at the Langstroths'? When she reached the cottage, however, he was still at work in his potato-patch, and

came to push the low gate open for her, with a spade sloped on his shoulder. Its edge was as bright as the burnished steel of a warrior.

"Do they lift well?" she asked.

"Some of the taters have 'demicked,'" he answered (Langstroth was a Yorkshireman), "so the sooner they're out now the better. Will you come forward?"

She entered the low living-room; the fragrance of baking-day filled it, sweet as incense. Mrs. Langstroth dusted the chair she offered with a corner of the overall which concealed the ungainliness of her six months' pregnancy.

The two sat down to chat on indifferent subjects before Marion dared come to the point. "I've come to suggest that you should move into Gilbert's cottage. Now that his sons have left home he will be pleased to go into a smaller one. How do you like that idea?"

"I can't say I fancy moving, Miss Marion," she laughed, embarrassed. "We're right suited here, and you get fond of your home. We've lived here ever sin' we got married, though I must say we are a bit crowded now, and likely to be more so. Ezra would grieve to leave his garden. He's that set on flowers and vegetables." She paused to watch Marion's eyes travelling round the kitchen. "I'm

afraid you're finding us all upset—I haven't had time to side up." The house-proud woman pointed to the golden loaves ranged on the kitchen table lightly covered by a cloth, and the horse on which miniature cotton dresses—faded pink, mauve and blue, like a border of phloxes—were airing.

The carter had come to stand in the doorway ; morose and speechless he followed their conversation.

" You'll make a nice garden at the new cottage," Marion pleaded with him.

" I'm not so strook on it," was all he said ; " takes years to get a place in order." It was evident that the Langstroths did not wish to stir. They had grown into this humpbacked cot, of pure Hansel and Gretel architecture. Were the window-panes of sugar-plums, and the roof of gingerbread ? Perhaps at this moment the children who slept under it were breaking a piece off the eaves and nibbling. She spoke of them. " You should consider the family, Mrs. Langstroth. They need more room to stretch themselves. I know it's a wrench to go, but you'll settle quickly once you are in Gilbert's house. Turn it over in your minds, and then let Mr. Baxter know. . . . I must be going."

As she walked through the garden she heard one of the little ones call out in his sleep, and the

mother's West Riding voice, thick as cream which flows over the lip of a jug, replying, "Hoosh, Sammie; you'll wake the oothers."

A rhyme taught to the babies at her convent school in Paris came back to her :

*"Petit Jésus, venez chez nous.
J'ai ma maman qui aura bien soin de vous.
Elle chantera pour vous endormir
Et si mon frère vous éveille
Papa saura bien le punir."*

A pretty jingle—chimes from the belfry of a village—smaller than that, a peal rung from harebells swinging in the hot hand of a child.

It was near seven o'clock when she got back to the house. How still it was! The lamps were lit. After she had come in Sellars would lock the front door, and she would be a prisoner here till morning. She must find Sellars, for she had a telegram to send. No one answered her ring, so she walked into the passage which led to the offices to call him. Two long rows of bells were ranged here. The names of the rooms with which they communicated were painted below. Names which had not been altered for more than a hundred years—Saloon, Library, Dining-Room, the Little Room, Master Tom's :

and the bedrooms,—West Room, Chinese Room, Green, Red, Ponceau, Tapestry—Day Nursery, Night Nursery. . . .

Sellars appeared, a little flushed and self-righteous. He had been dressing, he explained, and his look implied that she should be doing likewise. But she had changed her mind. All she said was, “Will you send Millie to my boudoir? I had forgotten something I wanted to say to her.”

By the time the girl knocked on her door she had written out her telegram.

“I want you to take this down to the village at once. You’ve got a quarter of an hour before the post-office closes. It won’t take you long on your bicycle, but you must start at once.”

Millie should be her carrier-pigeon—she had soft dove’s eyes—a message carried under her grey cashmere sleeve could not go astray.

“Are you going to meet Joe this evening?” she asked, looking for a sixpence in her bag.

“Yes, Miss, later on, at the cross-roads.” Marion had reached her cross-roads, but she was no longer puzzled which to choose.

The south windows of her room overlooked the winding drive. She stood by them till she saw the lamp of Millie’s bicycle travelling apace along it. The brave little beacon, alone in the dark night,

disappeared round a bend, then reappeared. In a very few minutes the telegram would be given in. She had addressed it to Luke's rooms in Half Moon Street; he had said he would be waiting for it there.

Below her window-sill she could hear the rustling of the big magnolia leaves, of malachite and bronze. One belated bud still remained on the tree. It would not flower, unless she gave it the warmth and shelter of her room. She opened the window and broke off the twig, feeling in the blackness for the cool ivory cone.

Her telegram had said, "Come to-morrow."

All are not taken ; there are left behind
Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing
And tender voices, to make soft the wind.
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting . . .
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone . . .
Crying, “ Where are ye, O my loved and loving ? ”
I know a Voice would sound. . . .

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

XVII

THE last session of the Coronation Committee was being held at the Jubilee Hall. The Vicar had been strongly in favour of running through the schedule once more, just to make sure every loophole for error had been securely stopped. He was chiefly concerned with the sports, of course, which would follow after the luncheon on the cricket-field. The big tent for the feast had been erected a week ago, and was flapping its empty belly on the far side of the pitch—carefully roped off, “for we can’t have the youngsters trampling all over *that*.”

The presentation mugs had not been unpacked. The crates containing them were lying in Miss Usherwood’s scullery : she would be glad to get rid of them. So far no one but she had seen them, but they were very pretty, she said, only it seemed strange that two crowned heads should adorn them : she would never get accustomed to that, or at least she hadn’t so far. But the flags on the opposite side were the same old flags—flags of the land of hope and glory. The school-children had learned Elgar’s

melody—approximately—and they were word-perfect, but some of the older ones were still apt to sing “Queen” for “King” when it came to bawling out the National Anthem. That was inexcusable, and any boy or girl so egregiously forgetful did not deserve to receive a mug, the choir-master had told them at the last practice.

The Reverend Edward Piercey was running through the time-table. The procession to the church would form up outside the school at a quarter-past ten. He hoped the Mothers’ Union with their banner would not delay them as they had done on Empire Day. The service would begin at ten-thirty, and would occupy three-quarters of an hour. At twelve-thirty the old people’s dinner would be served them in the marquee, and the sports would begin at three—tea for the kiddies at half-past four.

Miss Porter remarked that it would be rather a scramble to get the dinner-things cleared away and washed up and the tea-things laid, but Mrs. Piercey rebuked her. People must expect to be a little pressed and hustled on Coronation Day. Foxley was too fond of playing at Sleepy Hollow. Of course it would be a tiring day for everyone, especially for the Vicar—but think of the fatigue of the King and Queen.

"And of the troops lining the streets," Mrs. Phipps added.

"And of the Archbishop of Canterbury—he's such an aged man," Mrs. Ames reminded them. "Luckily it's only the King he has to crown; the Archbishop of York is to place the crown on Queen Alexandra's head, I believe."

Mrs. Piercey's eyes were scanning the programme of the sporting events. "I'm not sure that we ought to have a sack-race; it seems rather out of harmony with the solemnity of the occasion. I don't think we should regard the 26th of June as another opportunity for mafficking."

"Perhaps an egg-and-spoon race would be more appropriate, and quite as enjoyable."

"Not for the spectators," Miss Porter challenged.

"Then there would be the difficulty of collecting the pot eggs. If they have to be bought that's another expense," Mary Usherwood quibbled. "I see the official cost of the Coronation is reckoned at £359,289 : 5s., and by referring to a Blue Book I find Queen Victoria's amounted to £200,000 only."

"But we haven't had a Coronation for sixty-four years; we can surely afford to be a little lavish!"

Mr. Piercey cleared his throat; he was undecided

as to which of the ladies he should support. He changed the venue. "The sandwiches for tea are going to be made at the Vicarage. Some kind volunteers have offered to help with them, but I know Mrs. Piercey would be very grateful if any of you here would care to look in directly after the service."

"It's quite extraordinary how long they take to cut," Mrs. Piercey lamented. "Ham especially—the beef goes quicker, I know that by the choir treat. My little Eliza can't cope with them, and since she heard that Queen Alexandra is entertaining ten thousand servant-girls at tea, she talks of leaving me and getting a place in London—rubbish!"

Interest was flagging.

"What do you think of the Coronation Honours List?" somebody at the end of the table asked, whilst Mr. Piercey checked the list of villagers who would be given luncheon.

"They are very much what one expected. Everything has been discounted, and one has got a little blasé. As to the decorations, they've positively got on my nerves! But I suppose the King and Queen, who are so tactful, drive about London with their eyes closed, so that all may come as a beautiful surprise on the day."

"My poor man is very much annoyed at the dislocation in town. He's not been able to enter his club by the front door for the last three weeks—has to creep in through the mews at the back, and he says the scaffolding of the stands makes it pitch-dark inside. He wishes never to live through another coronation."

"Perhaps he may have to—King Edward is sixty."

"Well, it will all be over in two days, and Foxley will be Sleepy Hollow again," sighed Mrs. Piercey.

"Any more business to transact?" Mr. Piercey discouraged his committee from riding too wide of hounds. "I suppose we shall have to go into the accounts with the treasurer? When shall we meet again?"

"When the hurly-burly's done," Mrs. Ames answered flippantly.

"I will make that announcement in church next Sunday."

There was no need to prolong the session. The ladies rose.

"I'm rather perplexed about the red, white, and blue posies for the tent. What blue flowers are there, except cornflowers, and they look so Eton-and-Harrowish?" Miss Porter was drawing on her cotton gloves.

“Don’t bother about blue flowers as long as we have blue skies.” Mrs. Ames looked up at the heavens.

“It looks all right now, but anything may come out of a clear sky. It seems like inviting rain—all this. . . .” She made a wide gesture which embraced the village street, beflagged and garlanded.

“I’m not surprised that the nervous tension is affecting the King’s health. I felt very uneasy about it myself when he did not attend Ascot ten days ago. That was ominous. Ascot without the Prince of—the King, I mean—isn’t Ascot at all. It seemed too extraordinary to watch Queen Alexandra drive up the course without him. The rumours are being contradicted in the papers, but I know better.” She shook her head mournfully as she gazed at the cardboard portraits of Their Majesties outside the post-office. “I’ve just got to go in here to get some stamps—d’you mind?”

“I like the royal title being enlarged. Don’t you? ‘King by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and of *All the British Dominions beyond the Seas.*’ That’s got a magnificent Rule Britannia ring about it—like adding a new prong to her trident. . . . The Boer generals, Botha and De Wet and Delarey, are coming to England shortly to plead for considerate treatment.

There's very little bitterness left on either side—wonderful!—and South Africa is sure to become a 'dominion beyond the seas' some day." Mrs. Ames had pushed open the door of the shop and allowed the querulous jangling of the bell to continue till Mrs. Barnes appeared. She was at her dinner, and came out of the living-room still masticating.

"Lovely day again, Miss Porter. Good morning, Mrs. Ames. All pennies? . . . Sorry you've had to wait, but my husband is taking off a telegram." The tap-tapping of the Morse machine was like the mysterious beat of a tom-tom. Short short long—long short—long short long. It was fascinating. Mrs. Ames could never understand how this mysterious rhythm was interpreted.

The stamps were neatly folded. "I like the new issue, don't you? A king should have a beard; without one he would look like a Roman Emperor. Anything further?"

Miss Porter said she hoped Mr. Barnes had finished his dinner—it smelt so good—for he would have to start off on his journey as soon as the little orange envelope had been licked down.

A child had sneaked into the post-office behind them and was resting its grubby chin on the counter.

"I expect it's Coronation Rock you're after, isn't it, sonny?" The postmistress reached out for the big canister and shook it violently to loosen the sticky mass. "That's very popular just now!" She winked at the ladies while she decanted the striped sweets into a paper screw.

A light wind had sprung up, and a few drops of rain were pockmarking the dusty surface of the road when they walked out. They had not gone fifty yards before the postmaster's bicycle overtook them. He touched his cap and dismounted.

"A telegram has just come through to say the Coronation has been cancelled."

"You can't cancel a Coronation!"

"His Majesty underwent a serious operation this morning." He did not wait to hear their comments, but flung his leg across the bar and pedalled onwards.

The shower grew heavier. Miss Porter and Mrs. Ames ignored it. They stood irresolute in the middle of the village street. Stretched across it, from house to house, strings of little flags and pennons nodded inanely at them. With the rising wind the Union Jack on the church tower had wound itself tight around the flagstaff. There was not a soul in sight.

"I don't know what we'd better do," said Mrs. Ames weakly.

"I must go to Foxley at once."

"But you can't—your hat—it'll get drenched."

As there was no means of dissuading her, the two parted. Minnie Porter entered the Verlander Arms and emerged with a borrowed umbrella, then continued her forward march doggedly. It's just her insatiable curiosity, Mrs. Ames reflected, as she watched the retreating figure; she hopes to get more news up there. Irritated, she turned up the Brackenham road homewards, hoping the pattern on her voile dress would not run when it got thoroughly wet.

Minnie Porter's was very damp when she got up to the Hall. She wiped the soles of her button boots conscientiously on the scraper whilst she was waiting for the front door to open.

"Anyone at home?" she enquired breathlessly when Sellars appeared.

"Nobody, Miss, except Madame Grandchoose. I expect you've heard she's come from France to stay with us over the Coronation." (Sellars was aware that little happened at Foxley without Miss Porter knowing it.)

"Then I must see her."

"Will you step into the library? I'm not sure where she is." But he had not to seek further. The old Frenchwoman was seated in the window with

her petit-point and books. She greeted the visitor with enthusiasm.

“ *Quelle bonne surprise, Mademoiselle !* You come here of course to find Marianne. But sit down and rest. You have had a shower-bath, I see, on your journey.” She made room for Minnie on the sofa.

“ It’s a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you . . . two years. I never thought then that I would have the joy of revisiting this charming château, but I was invited to spend this historic week in England. My hostess has arranged for me to see the great London pageant, and here I am ; she has provided me with a seat in Pêle-Mêle. Meanwhile I am enjoying another lovely English summer. You British have no idea how we French Royalists mourn the lost splendours of our throne. Each time I see a little *bonhomme* drive out of the Elysée and lift his top-hat to the few who pause to see their President, tears of rage fill my eyes.”

Miss Porter was marking time for her coup. The hour was not yet ripe. The sun had come out, and, in this warm south room, her dress was drying nicely. But the squib she carried in her hand was damped by Marion’s absence. She would pause before she let off the firework.

“ My *séjour* here has made my thoughts turn to Madame Mohl again. You remember my lecture

about your distinguished compatriot? I was looking only this morning at her account of the great Victoria's coronation. There is nothing more fascinating than to align the events in history; then the centuries join hands across the gap of years." She opened a volume that was lying at her side. "You see it is dated June 29th, 1838. Mary Clarke is writing to her future husband Julius Mohl. I'll read it to you.

" ' I was in Westminster Abbey from five in the morning to half-past four in the afternoon. I saw the Queen, who has a charming countenance, and all the dukes, and peers, and bishops, and archbishops, and all these people with crowns on their heads, and the peeresses all in diamonds, and trains held up by pages—in short I never saw such a number of grand folks; and when I saw Wellington I wept like a calf from tender emotion.

" ' The Queen had a train twelve yards long, carried by eight pretty young ladies dressed in white, and without trains; they had wreaths of white roses on their heads and their dresses were trimmed with white roses and green leaves. I never saw anything so pretty. They were followed by eight ladies-in-waiting, who had

pale blue trains and plumes of white feathers on their heads, their trains were carried by pages. All the peeresses had long red trains . . . in short, trains played the principal part in the ceremony. That robber Soult was cheered, which made me very indignant ; but I was assured the reason was that we wanted to make up to him for having beaten him long ago.

“ ‘ I was obliged to get up at a quarter past three, and to be in the carriage at four, so as to reach the Abbey at five ; and we did not get home till six. I was nearly dead. I went with Miss Smirke, and I went to bed at her house directly after dinner and slept for thirteen hours without interruption.’

“ A simple little letter, as you see ; how many written this week will tell the same unadorned tale—and in after years they will read fresh as this one, which has not withered though more than sixty Junes have come and gone. . . . What rejoicings there are in every British heart just now ! The South African campaign has ended. The dove with the olive leaf is on the wing. Edward VII is a consummate diplomatist. Through him England and France will learn to understand one another. It is time to put an end to the friction between them,

and he can do it. The Dreyfus affair bred much ill-feeling here, I know, and the Fashoda incident kindled anger in France, but what real obstacles lie between us and you? The Moroccan question—moonshine! I imagine an entente between England, France, and Russia, which would for ever banish war from Europe—but an old French author described imagination as ‘*la folle du logis*.’ However, we shall see! I know Monsieur Delcassé and our good Monsieur Cambon here in London are working hard to effect a *rapprochement*, but we need your King’s good offices, his kindly smile, the smoke of his cigar of peace. . . .”

Miss Porter was growing impatient; it would have been easier to stem Niagara than to arrest this torrent. But there came a moment when Madame Grandchose had to pause for breath. Minnie jumped in.

“And how terrible it is to realise that so valuable a life is in danger!”

“How, danger? Nothing can happen to him. Your police are admirable; one of your bobbies is worth ten of our *agents*.”

“Something has happened already. The King is seriously ill, the Coronation cannot take place.”

“*Grand Dieu!* It’s a catastrophe—the end of all things.”

It was at least the end of Madame Grandchose's verbosity. Miss Porter leaned back in her chair. The Frenchwoman's reaction was gratifying; the excitable Latin temperament seldom disappointed. You could depend upon it in moments of crisis.

"Where is Marion?" Minnie asked, careful to display the British phlegm, yet revelling in every spasm of the troubled countenance opposite.

"I am expecting her at any moment. She has been in London and will bring us the latest bulletin. *Miséricorde humaine!* Alas for the frailty of human life! Let us pray his may be spared. I shall begin a novena at once. Let's go on to the terrace, then we shall see the carriage arrive. The sun is shining again—good omen."

She led the way—still heaving with sighs and uttering small doleful interjections—to a seat under the magnolia-covered wall.

"I love this sheltered courtyard; especially I love this doorway. I remember admiring it when I was here before. The golden stone is carved as richly as a picture-frame—an empty frame now, but ready to contain the living portrait of the most enchanting woman."

"It's been empty a long while—all last year. The house has been shut up for ages," Minnie said resentfully.

"But that was only natural—now she's installed here for always, she tells me. What is the name of this rose on the gateway?"

Her companion could not tell. "It's one of the old-fashioned kind; this is its second blooming. It will go on till Christmas," and, as Miss Porter was searching for the label: "Never mind, I prefer to give them names of my own, it makes them much more real to me. I shall christen it 'Souvenir de Marianne'"—she held the cluster close to her face and breathed in its delicate scent. "*Rose d'automne est plus qu'une autre exquisite*," she murmured, but Minnie Porter did not hear her. "I see the carriage at the bend in the drive." The old woman began to wave her handkerchief. "They've come, they are here."

The brougham passed the wrought-iron gates swiftly, and drove round to the back door. They had a fleeting vision of Newman sitting on the back seat, surrounded by a mountain of bandboxes and luggage.

"Another deception—this is a day of frustration, truly! What can have happened? . . . The butler will know. English butlers are omniscient."

Sellars came to explain that Marion had got out at the lodge, and was walking up the chase, and as they were about to question him further: "Excuse

me, Miss, I heard the nursery bell ring as I came from the pantry. I must go back to see if James has answered it."

"I would like the good Nannie to be told to bring my godson downstairs. He shall be here on the front-door steps to greet his parents. You see, Mademoiselle," she said, turning to Minnie after Sellars had left them, "I take a large share of credit for this *magnifique bébé*. I flatter myself that but for me the marriage might not have been."

The *magnifique bébé*, a passive resister, hesitated between smiles and tears when he was first placed on the wide foulard lap. Then he found a châtelaine dangling at the waistbelt; his fingers grew busy and his wriggling ceased. It was in vain that Madame Grandchose attempted to direct his attention towards the two figures in the park, crossing from light to shadow and again to light.

"Poor baby, he won't get his Coronation mug now on Thursday; it's too bad."

"*Regarde, mon petit chou*, they are over there, là-bas—regarde bien."

But the walkers were too far away for little Tom's blue glances to focus them. Serenely now he looked out over the wide landscape, as other Tom Verlanders had before him. His gaze embraced the giant elms above the herd of dappled deer, and

L A T E S U M M E R

the spread of curtaining woodland which enclosed them.

“How old is he?” Minnie asked.

Madame Grandchose had risen cautiously to her feet, clasping her burden.

“Marianne, Luc, come quick,” she called, for the wanderers were within ear-shot. “Don’t ask me his age, I never know the age of anyone. Six months, eight months perhaps, but he is the image of his mother. He is fresh as a rose, this Foxley rose whose loveliest bloom comes in late summer.”

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